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The Normalisation of Deviance

Editor's note 

It's a perfect June morning in Snowdonia. A light wind blows over Llyn Padarn as the dawn cloud breaks off the tops of the Glyders. A hunting kestrel hovers at sixty feet. There's something in the air that says it's going to be one of those special days.

I run the Snowdon Horseshoe and am back at the car before midday. The mountains are glowing gold and blue against the diamond-cut sky. High on the south side of the Pass, the skull-shaped shadow of Cryn Las hangs over the side of Crib Goch, promising an oasis of cool in the afternoon heat. On autopilot, I stuff rock shoes and chalkbag into a lightweight pack and dash up the hill. Soon I'm standing below Joe Brown's 1953 masterpiece, *The Grooves*. It's one of the finest mountain rock climbs in Britain.

A small but awkward roof guards entry to a lonely dihedral. I climb nervously at first, compulsively dusting the green lichen from my shoes on every move. Once I've passed the roof, I settle into the glorious rhythm of unencumbered climbing. After four hundred feet of continuous movement, I reach the final impasse: a delicate traverse leftwards to the shallow hanging groove that leads to the top of the wall. With every step out across this narrow shelf, the exposure increases until it feels like staring from the window of a plane.

On the final groove, I glance down. Almost five hundred feet of mountain air separates me from the scree. Up here, I'm a lone dancer in a vast auditorium of silence and space. As I pull over the top of the crag, the thrill of soloing (which Tom Livingstone highlights on page 42), and all the reasons I used to solo regularly come flooding back. I'm also reminded of all of the other reasons why I've now stopped soloing almost entirely, which are best summed up by a

striking phrase formulated during NASA's inquest into the 1986 Challenger Shuttle disaster: 'the normalisation of deviance'. This is the process by which we do something that does not follow the accepted rules of good safety procedure (like climbing without a rope), which we get away with. Then, believing it's safe to make the same safety shortcut a second time, we do the same thing again. Repeat this process indefinitely, and something is likely to go wrong. The concept of 'the normalisation of deviance' applies to a great many cases in climbing, and in other adventure sports, where simple human error has led to a fatal accident. The phrase came to my attention when reading about the recent death of diver Guy Garmin in his attempt to break the world depth record on open-circuit scuba. With only four years' diving experience, Mr Garmin believed he 'knew more about technical diving than anyone else on the planet' [as quoted by his dive team, Scuba TEC]. This was clearly not the case. Instead, the practice he'd 'normalised' of doing increasingly deeper dives and getting away with it had led him to believe, incorrectly, that he was a diving genius. This created an illusion of invulnerability, which cost him his life.

Such illusions can be equally dangerous in climbing. The problem with on-sight free soloing is that you cannot know or even anticipate beforehand all of the variables that may affect your climb. You only know what they were in retrospect. As Donald Rumsfeld said, 'it's the unknown unknowns that get you.'

The fatal wingsuit flying accidents that recently took the lives of visionary climbers and BASE jumpers Sean Leary and Dean Potter were the result of the consistent practice of the increasingly dangerous. Wingsuit proximity flying has an incredibly high fatal-

ity rate, and as a pilot becomes more skilled, enabling more technically complex flights, the risks increase exponentially. A similar process may take place in alpinism; a mountaineer who climbs something high and hard will then attempt something higher and harder, in an inversion of the process that led to the death of Mr Garmin. In order to prevent situations of 'normalised deviance' in which you're taking increasingly greater risks, it's a good idea to develop some clear personal ground rules. The great Canadian climber and prolific soloist Peter Croft is still climbing hard today in his late 50s. His perspective on how to develop such discipline – in the practice of soloing or any other form of climbing – remains one of most intelligent I know: 'Cast the rules and fashions of the day way out in your peripheral vision where you can still see them, but only as a vague reference point. This doesn't mean that all the rules are gone. It might mean that you adopt a far tighter code of conduct to ensure the necessary level of intensity and adventure.'

If you still decide to go soloing, it's worth remembering John Bachar, one of America's most influential rock climbers. He died after a fall in 2009 from a relatively straightforward route at Mammoth Lakes, possibly after a hold broke. He had soloed thousands of routes in his life, many of them much harder than his final climb. On that day, probability was stacked against him. The final equation is a basic one: the more you solo, the greater the risks of soloing become. As Alex Honnold, the world's most accomplished free soloist, points out in his new book *Alone On The Wall* [reviewed on page 68 of this issue]: 'it may be that it was the sheer volume of 35 years of soloing that finally caught up with him.'

- David Pickford

Climb

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THIS PAGE: American climber Katie Lambert high on the tufa-encrusted leaning headwall of *Picos Pardos* (8b) at Oliana, Spain. **DAVID PICKFORD** **COVER:** Will Stanhope making the first free ascent of the *Tom Egan Memorial Route* (5.14) in the Bugaboos, British Columbia, Canada, in August 2015. Turn to page 6 to find out more about this extraordinary climb. **TIM KEMPLE**

LEAD FEATURE

THE MINES OF MORIA

The vast and multi-dimensional edifice of Twll Mawr lies at the heart of the Llanberis slate quarries. Top British climber **Calum Muskett** and dedicated 'slatehead' **Mark Dicken** introduce the exciting possibilities of this extraordinary cliff for both trad climbers and sport climbers

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Super Splitter

Stunning 13 pitch alpine big wall
finally free climbed in the Bugaboos

The Bugaboos, a sub-range of the Purcell Mountains in British Columbia, Canada, is home to some of the most striking granite spires on Earth. Prominent amongst them is Snowpatch Spire (3084m), which is riddled with sinuous cracklines and is home to many of North America's toughest alpine routes. 28 year old Canadian climber Will Stanhope first visited the range in 2008, when he climbed *The Power of Lard* (5.12c) which was then amongst the Bugaboos' hardest climbs. From his ascent of that route, he noticed a tiny crackline that ran unbroken up the otherwise blank, diamond-shaped headwall that characterized the East Face of Snowpatch. This was the line of the *Tom Egan Memorial Route* a 13 pitch A3 aid climb established in the 70s.

Re-climbing *The Power of Lard* 2 years later with Hazel Findlay, Stanhope opted to abseil down the *Tom Egan*. His obsession with it began then, when he discovered the crack was free climbable - only just - apart from the first 30 feet. In an interview with *Alpinist Magazine* Stanhope says he 'picked the line because aesthetically it's the coolest thing I've ever seen. It's a gorgeous chunk of rock—bone white to gold. If you like finger[tip] cracks, then this is the ultimate climb.'

In 2012 he arrived for the full summer season to work on the route with long time friend American Matt Segal. If the names seem familiar to British readers, then the response to 'what have they done on grit?' is big things, but at opposite ends of fortune. Segal was part of 'Team America' who blitzed gritstone's hardest testpieces in 2008. Segal himself climbed various hard routes such as *The End of the Affair* (E8). Stanhope had a less positive experience on gritstone, when he became the unlucky soul to break the flake on *Parthian Shot* (E9) in an attempt in early 2011, cracking a vertebrae as well as fracturing his ankle. Returning to form in 2012, Stanhope made the 4th ascent of *The Prophet* (5.13d), Leo Houlding's El Cap masterpiece.

Battled hardened as this pair were, it came as no surprise that they were willing to put a big effort in on freeing the

Tom Egan Memorial Route. In fact, the effort eventually stretched for 100 days on the wall over 4 summer seasons. The route boiled down to 2 5.14 pitches; the first was pitch 4, which they named the 'Drunken Dawn Wall' after they found an extremely thin 5.14 face sequence that avoided the initial crack section. Both climbers knew the *Dawn Wall* team well and their concurrent efforts provided mutual motivation, with *Dawn Wall* first ascensionist Tommy Caldwell commenting on Stanhope and Segal's efforts at the time: 'I find the fact that they stick it out up there in a tent year after year incredibly inspiring. I think it is probably the first time that someone has taken on a multi-year big wall free climbing objective that is so far from a road. It takes a incredible resolve and toughness to endure this kind of project for so long. I find that kind of commitment admirable above all else in my fellow climbers.'

Eventually, at the end of this summer, Stanhope managed to successfully piece together the Drunken Dawn Wall pitch, and the following 5.14 and two 5.13 pitches up the crack itself. 'I got very lucky and on my second try I sent the pitch, putting Matt in a most unenviable, uncomfortable position. Try as he might, he was unable to send that pitch, but in the process put in some of the fiercest and most gritty efforts I've ever had the honour of witnessing. I was almost in tears watching my buddy give it his all, with all the cards on the table.'

Segal came achingly close to his own clean lead, failing only on the crux face pitch. He later commented that 'I've never put so much effort into one climb and am extremely heartbroken for not sending with Will, but I'm super honoured to have witnessed his ascent and to have shared so many days on the wall with him. I guess I just wasn't meant to send [the route] this year but am trying to look on the bright side: Spending more time in the Bugaboos isn't the worst thing in the world.'

THIS PAGE: Will Stanhope high on the crux pitch of *The Tom Egan Memorial Route* (5.14) in the Bugaboos, Canada. TIM KEMPLE



Coast Lightning

Major ascent in the Coast Range by strong international team

Mount Waddington in British Columbia's Coast Range saw an impressive new route added in a lightning-quick expedition this summer. Canadian Paul McSorley, New Zealander Mayan Smith-Gobat and German Ines Papert managed to climb a new mixed line on the remote Southwest Buttress in a three day round trip from the town of Squamish.

The buttress had seen a couple of previous attempts, including one in 2011 from Jason Kruk and Tony Richardson, who spent a week approaching the cliff on foot and by boat across Twist Lake. They climbed to within two pitches of the summit before poor ice conditions forced a retreat.

After waiting for a good weather window, Papert's team helicoptered in and started climbing at 5.30am the following day. They managed to climb free and onsight for 20 pitches to Waddington's northwest summit. The 800m route had difficulties up to 5.11+, WI3, M5, and ED1. After a bivi on their descent they reached their base camp at 10am the following morning, bivvied below the summit and descended to base camp via Angel Glacier to Dais Glacier the next day.

Papert described her feeling of euphoria on the summit: 'The light [at sunset] was magic, just to be there was a gift, and getting up to the top, made me even more psyched. Sharing such a great moment with such good friends was something really special.'

THIS PAGE: Ines Papert high on the first ascent of Mount Waddington's Southwest Buttress. PAUL MCSORLEY



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1278m of wonder 67 pitch mega-traverse at Swanage

David Coley together with various members of the South Devon Mountaineering Club has completed what is perhaps the longest continuous trad route in the UK: *Wonderland*, a full traverse of Swanage's dramatic Boulder Ruckle cliffs.

'The idea was a simple one. The cliffs in Southern England are short, very short, so let's climb sideways. Swanage already had a long traverse and it wasn't clear if it had been repeated, so we went to have a look. We quickly found that, although it takes the most obvious line, it follows a mid-height band of the worst rock on the cliff (apart from the blocks and mud near the top). We decided that it would be safer to do a new route on the solid rock either side of the band. We guessed we were looking at 50 or so pitches.'

Over 20 or so visits, Dave and his team climbed 67 pitches up to E1 in 12 distinct sections. Each of these sections ending at a possible escape route Dave envisages that the climb will be enjoyed in sections, although he does expect talented teams to attempt the first in a day ascent.

'At the core of the idea is to give as many people as possible a go at being part of a new route. I see it as a community thing, but also as a way of helping people see what is possible in the UK. Most of the team had never been to Swanage before, some had never been on a sea cliff, and some were climbing at their limit. The youngest was 12, the oldest nearly 70. The complete route is a testament to their strength of character.'



The Great British Climb Off Hamer Brothers complete UK grand tour

Brothers Sam and Ed Hamer, the subjects of last month's *Climb* interview by Mike Hutton, completed an extraordinary grand tour this summer, taking in some of the best climbs in the British Isles and the Republic of Ireland, using the routes in the arch-classic tome *Extreme Rock* as a basis for their adventure. As Sam said of the tour, 'It's long been an ambition of mine to make a single tour of all points of the compass in England, Wales and Scotland, and finally across to Ireland. *Extreme Rock* has been an inspiration to my climbing and has driven me to push myself on as many of these extraordinary routes as possible. We will also attempt some of the less travelled adjacent routes and test ourselves on the harder lines as well.'

Ed Hamer is sponsored by Scarpa

THIS PAGE LEFT: David Coley amongst the dramatic scenery of the Boulder Ruckle on the first ascent of *Wonderland* (E1, 1278m) **PETER CALLAGHAN** **THIS PAGE RIGHT:** Ed Hamer soloing *Edge Lane* (E5 5c) at Millstone Edge in the Peak District. **MIKE HUTTON**

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Boogie Nights

Brits free Norwegian wall in midnight sun



The 400m north face of Store Blåmann lies on the island of Kvaløya in the far northwest of Norway. The mountain has a lot going for it: superb granite, plus 24 hour Arctic daylight between late May and late July. But it does have one downside: Norway's legendary rainfall. It was this later factor that proved one of the biggest challenges for the team of leading British climbers Jacob Cook, Dave MacLeod and Calum Muskett.

MacLeod had visited Blåmann before, making the first free ascent of *Bongo Bar* (8a) in 2011. During that ascent he noticed a lone bolt belay high amongst some roofs – the line of the aid route *Disco 2000*. This summer he returned with Cook and Muskett, intent on a free ascent.

The route starts with the first two pitches of the free climb *Arctandria* (8a+ or E8) including the crux, a blank looking corner. Cook and MacLeod both managed to redpoint this making the most of cooler night-time conditions; MacLeod's ascent was made around midnight. Descending for a rest as the morning broke, the team were back soon to work on the crux pitch of *Disco 2000*, which veers left through a series of roofs. This was when the battle with the weather began in earnest. 'Later on it started to rain again' said MacLeod. 'Calum descended the fixed rope first, and as myself and Jacob descended, I noticed the temperature dropping. I stopped and asked Jacob if I could try the crux pitch now. As it turned out, while I led this, Jacob was getting steadily soaked by the rain on the hanging belay below me. On the roofs above, I didn't even notice. I was in my own bubble, absorbed by this brilliant varied pitch.' It was another 8a+ pitch and opened the way to a series of challenging pitches up to 7c+, one of which included a huge horizontal dyno that succumbed to a flying manoeuvre by Cook, with the 13 pitch route freed just as a 4 day storm broke. The team were hoping for a one day free ascent, but 'after more days of rain, the face was soaking again, so we didn't get to even try' says MacLeod, 'but I was still really happy that we managed to take every moment of dry weather to get all the pitches freed in the sessions we did get.'

THIS PAGE: Jacob Cook on the first 8a+ pitch of *Disco 2000*, on Blåmann, Norway. CALUM MUSKETT

Harold Drasdo (1930-2015) by John Appleby

Harold Drasdo was in the vanguard of the remarkable post war ascendancy of working class Northern English rock climbers. Born in Bradford in 1930, Harold and his younger brother Neville, like so many northern activists, began their climbing careers by exploring the local Yorkshire crags and quarries. Harold soon established himself as a leading light of the loose affiliation of local climbers known as 'The Bradford Lads'. Inspired by fellow Bradfordian, the legendary Arthur Dolphin, Harold began to rack up the number of first ascents in the Lake District with routes like *North Crag Eliminate*, *Grendal*, *Anarchist* and *Sostenuto* amongst his classic collection. Despite mainly climbing within his Bradford circle, there was a friendly rivalry and cooperation with climbers from other clubs like the Manchester Rock and Ice club and the rival Alpha Club. Activists from all over the north would arrive each weekend to share the same dosses, barns and huts in the main climbing arenas. Swapping tales of gnarly first ascents, irate shotgun-wielding landowners, and hinting at recently discovered unclimbed crags of rich potential.

In the early 1950's, Harold and brother Neville became the first British climbers to explore the great unclimbed cliffs of The Poisoned Glen, in Donegal in the far west of Ireland. At that time, Donegal really was the back of beyond and it took a great deal of planning and effort to just get there. However, their reward was several first ascents on the beetling 1000' cliffs. Their activity piquing the interest of top British climbers like Chris Bonington and Allen Austin, who came over and made their own mark on the cliffs.

Towards the end of the fifties, Harold had trained as a teacher and was working as an instructor in a Peak District outdoor activities centre when he took on the authorship of the Fell and Rock Club's first climbing guidebook to Buttermere and the Far Eastern Fells: a daunting undertaking for someone who usually had to hitch-hike between some of the remotest crags in the Lake District, and often had to solo the climbs due to a lack of partners. With his later guide to Lliwedd, he would become the first to pen guides for both the Fell and Rock and the Climbers' Club.

Throughout the fifties and sixties, as working class British climbers began to find the ways and means to extend their orbit to the continent, his explorations included trips to the Alps, the USA and Spain.

In the early sixties he had secured a position as warden and chief instructor at The Towers Outdoor Pursuits Centre in Capel Curig within the Snowdonia National Park, and had married his lifetime partner, Maureen. He was to remain in North Wales for the rest of his life. Despite his demanding full time position, his spare time was still spent climbing and exploring the cliffs of North Wales. Harold became a prodigious author of articles and essays for magazines and journals. His writing was of rare quality and insight, for even within a sport which boasts a disproportionate number of cerebral participants, Harold was a true intellectual, refined scholar and a first rate mind.

His books included the highly influential *Education in the Mountain Centres*, a work which emphasised the positive value of teaching young people to appreciate and value the natural environment - a remarkably prescient message at the time. *The Mountain Spirit*, jointly edited with US climber and academic, Michael Tobias, was an anthology of writings based on philosophical and spiritual interpretations which writers throughout the ages had placed on the global mountain environment. His compelling autobiography *The Ordinary Route* was published by Ernest Press in 1997.

Harold's maintained a passion for climbing throughout his life. Whilst in his mid-sixties he began a climbing love affair with the sprawling south Snowdonia mountain of Arenig Fawr, establishing around two dozen first ascents on a peak which had never had a chronicled climbing history.

A lifelong political anarchist and environmentalist, Harold's attraction to these movements were based on an intellectual affinity to progressive ideals and a natural distaste for top-down governance.

Harold suffered a fall outside his local pub in 2015. Complications quickly set in, and he died a few days after being admitted to hospital. He leaves behind a rich legacy of rock climbs, writings, and of course the gratitude of thousands of youngsters who had benefited from his enlightened approach and instruction in outdoor education. He is survived by his wife Maureen.

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interstellar space

IMAGES FROM THE REEL ROCK FILM TOUR 2015



THIS PAGE: Daniel Woods cutting loose on the upper section of his epic highball line *The Process* at the Peabody Boulders, Bishop, California, in early 2015. Woods finally succeeded on the problem on 28th January this year, giving it V16 - the highest grade in bouldering. It is likely to be one of the hardest boulder problems in the world. Due to the considerable height of the problem (the top is over 9 metres) if it were in the UK such a line would be rated E10/11; *The Process* shows how the modern highball culture is shifting the boundary between bouldering and soloing. DAVID CLIFFORD



I approached the starting holds and set off. The rock did not feel as good compared to the other night, but my psyche took over. I felt more confident on the moves and was not thinking about the consequences. I was finally present with the line. I made it to the dyno and stuck the lip. My head did not race, but immediately went into executing the final section. I started up the headwall and came to the same place as before.

I did not hesitate this time and stuck the right hand razor. My fingers were numb and I sat there for a couple seconds to re-adjust and feel some sort of bite. This was not working, so I took it as is, brought my left foot up to a higher foothold and committed to the last iron-cross move. I stuck this move and felt safe. My hands were still numb, but I was able to regain back some circulation for the final mantle.

Once I arrived in the no-hands rest my survival instincts fully kicked in. At this point I was committed, and was forced to go to the top or get seriously injured. I breathed slowly in and out through my nose to lower my heart rate and began the quest to the summit. All of my senses were firing in unison. I could feel the stillness of the air around me.

I heard my toe rubber grind into each crystallized smear. I could smell the rock and feel its energy. I was attached and not letting go.

I stood on top of the Grandpa Peabody boulder beneath the stars and could faintly see the lantern light glowing down below.

I'd learned how to be present in the face of fear and accept it. Fear was not my enemy, but my aid. This line tested many of my attitudes and took me on a crazy ride: patience, beginner's mind, trust, acceptance, and letting go all appeared while projecting this line. After I got down off of the boulder, Dan had a couple more tries. He got close but ended up splitting both index fingertips. We then popped some bottles and had a celebration under the Grandpa Peabody.

- Daniel Woods on the first ascent of *The Process*, January 28th, 2015

exposure

THIS PAGE: Kevin Jorgeson climbing the crux pitch 15 (5.14d) during his first free ascent of *Dawn Wall*, El Capitan, with Tommy Caldwell in January 2015. Jorgeson spent 7 days attempting this pitch before finally succeeding. BRETT LOWELL



exposure



**'TODAY KEVIN MANAGED TO CLIMB PITCH 15 IN THE MOST INSPIRED CLIMBING
MOMENT OF HIS LIFE. IT WAS SUCH AN INTENSE AND INCREDIBLE THING TO
WITNESS. IT'S NOT OVER YET, BUT THINGS ARE LOOKING GOOD'**

TOMMY CALDWELL DESCRIBING HIS PARTNER KEVIN JORGESON'S SUCCESS ON THE CRUX
PITCH 15 OF DAWN WALL, AFTER 11 ATTEMPTS SPREAD OVER 7 DAYS.



exposure

THIS PAGE LEFT:

Tommy Caldwell high on the first free ascent of *Dawn Wall* (5.14d, 850m) on El Capitan, Yosemite.

COREY RICH

THIS PAGE LOWER:

Alex Honnold enjoying what he describes in his new book *Alone On The Wall* as 'a really fun 5 day camping trip': his first ascent with Tommy Caldwell of The Fitz Traverse, the first complete, continuous traverse of the Fitzroy Massif, Patagonia.

AUSTIN SIADAK

FACING PAGE TOP:

The Fitzroy Massif towering above El Chalten, Patagonia, under a typically brooding summer sky.

AUSTIN SIADAK

FACING PAGE LOWER:

Jimmy Webb making the second ascent of the stunning highball arête of *Livein' Large* (8C/V15) at the Champagne sector in Rocklands, South Africa. The line was first established by Finnish climber Nalle Hukkataival.

BEAU KAHLER



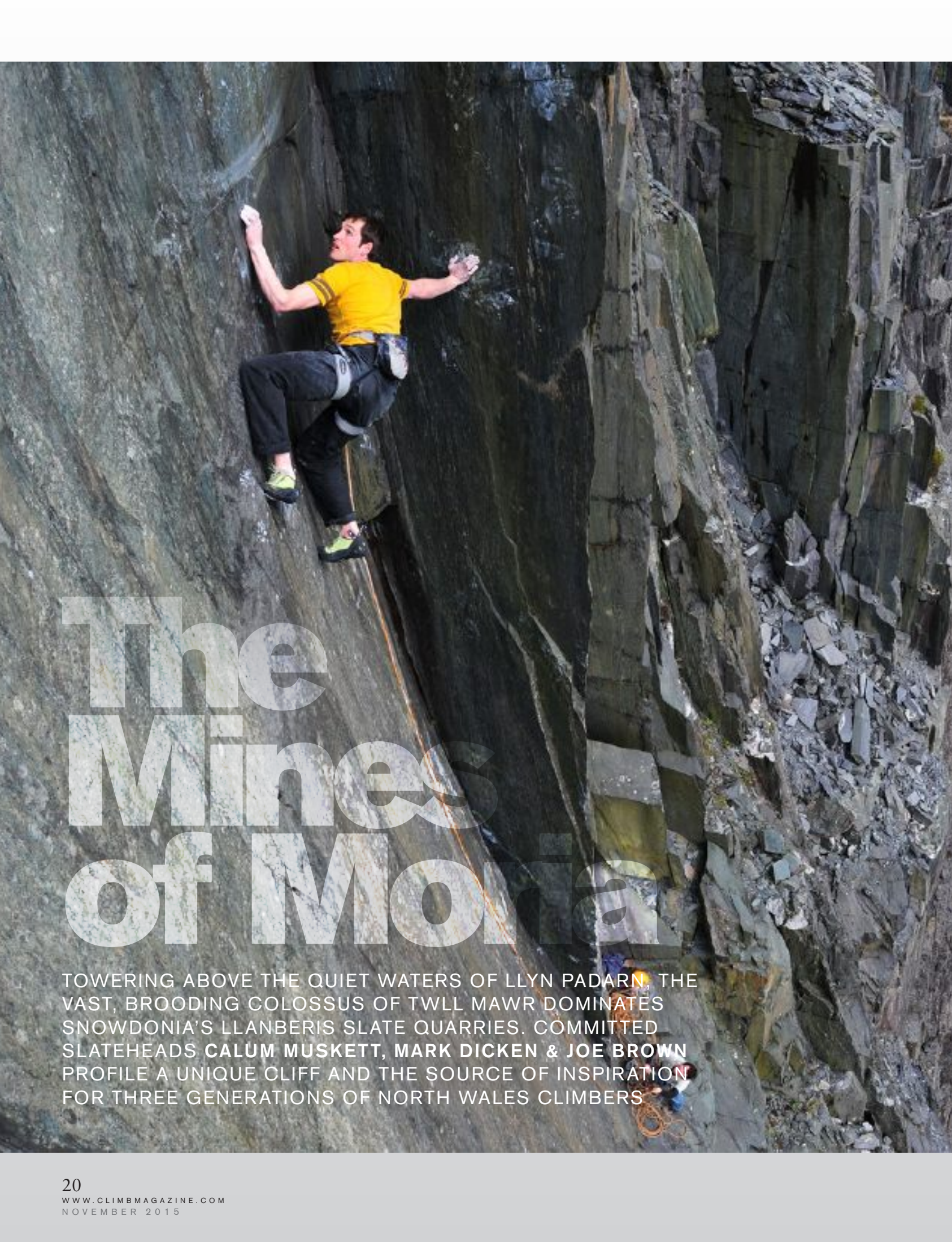
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The Mines of Moria

TOWERING ABOVE THE QUIET WATERS OF LLYN PADARN, THE VAST, BROODING COLOSSUS OF TWLL MAWR DOMINATES SNOWDONIA'S LLANBERIS SLATE QUARRIES. COMMITTED SLATEHEADS **CALUM MUSKETT, MARK DICKEN & JOE BROWN** PROFILE A UNIQUE CLIFF AND THE SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR THREE GENERATIONS OF NORTH WALES CLIMBERS



By the mid nineteen-eighties slate climbing was rising in popularity. The lycra clad era of government sponsored climbers had arrived and the slate quarries were as close to a blank canvas as any climber could find in the rapidly developing climbing scene in North Wales. Entire new sectors were being discovered in the quarries and new routes were being established rapidly. By 1986 many of the more obvious lines had been climbed on slate but there was one wall that had been largely overlooked – the west wall of Twll Mawr, soon to be dubbed The Quarryman Wall.

Joe Brown and Claude Davies' *Opening Gambit* in 1971 was the beginning of climbing in the Dinorwig quarries, tackling perhaps the largest continuous wall anywhere on slate. Though audacious and adventurous in terms of experience, it was a world away from why slate climbing became popular over a decade later.

It was in 1986, when a young Johnny Dawes appeared on the scene, that Twll Mawr would begin to receive the sort of attention which would make its highly unorthodox climbing world renowned in the years to come.

'Twll Mawr was a revelation' Dawes told me. 'A perfect angle; the blend of blank and featured spot on. Where there were holds they were angled and shaped for curious solutions to moves to emerge. There are comfy ledges to belay on, big wall exposure and views of the mountains.'

Dawes made the first ascent of *The Quarryman* in 1986; it was probably the hardest multipitch route in the UK at the time and certainly one of the most enigmatic. The mixture of bold 'designer danger' sport climbing with slippery groove climbing and desperate slab moves would make this route a famously tough challenge and only within reach of climbers with good all round technique. When I asked Dawes about when he first discovered the line he recalled that 'the lowest-angled part of the wall was the blankest part, the crux, while the groove included the whole panoply of bridging moves. To have it all filmed and kept for posterity in *Stone Monkey* was a real bonus.'

The final sequence of the seminal 1986 climbing film *Stone Monkey* shows Johnny climbing the infamous Quarryman groove, which he managed to climb a staggering three times in one day to get all the different camera angles. This was no mean feat considering Steve McClure, arguably Britain's best sport climber, commented that he's 'climbed 8c in shorter time and with less effort' than *The Quarryman* groove demanded. McClure is still the only climber to have completed a one day ascent of the route, which has yet to receive a clean ground up ascent.

Dawes' contribution to climbing in Twll Mawr didn't stop with *The Quarryman* though. His adjacent route *The Firé Escape* (E7 6c) boasts what has been called 'the scariest run-out in Wales', with a potential 25 metre whipper from the crux. Would-be ascensionists should bear in mind that a clumsy James McHaffie recently pulled the jug off before the crux sequence, and the route has yet to receive a re-ascent.

THIS PAGE: North Wales expert and die-hard slatehead Pete Robins climbing the crux groove pitch of *The Quarryman* (8a/E8) on the Back Wall of Twll Mawr. IAN PARNELL



Beginning immediately to the right of *The Quarryman* lies *The Wonderful World of Walt Disney* (E6 6b), a fantastic companion route, albeit at an easier grade. It features a mixture of climbing styles but the third 'jump' pitch is undoubtedly the most memorable: a flying leap across a wide groove [see photo on page 25]. The route is predominantly well bolted and would fall in at around 7b/7b+.

The hardest route from this era is undoubtedly *Couer de Lion*, which was originally graded at E6 7a by Johnny Dawes who had been criticised around the time of the first ascent for over-grading. The new guidebook grades the route at E8 7a, and when I asked James McHaffie why this route hadn't been repeated for almost thirty years he told me:

'The crux is one of those terrifying links of moves where you know you could fluff any of them, and it's hard to force yourself to set off into them, let alone the dangerous climbing to gain it. Many of the bigger grade climbs I've done seem a path by comparison.' Enough said...

After this period of intensive new routing Twll Mawr hit a quiet phase with little development for nearly twenty years. The most significant new route in this period was Adam Wainwright's *Blockhead*

Twll Mawr was a revelation: a perfect angle, big wall feel, and mountain views

- Johnny Dawes

(E7 6c), which ascends thin cracks directly above the first pitch of *The Quarryman*. I would stick my head above the parapet and suggest that this route is one of the best of its grade in Wales and it has yet to receive an ascent taking in the logical start up *The Quarryman*'s first pitch.

It was 2012 when I followed James McHaffie into Twll Mawr to belay him on the *Meltdown* project. This long standing and well-documented project already had a big reputation and it was interesting to watch Caff's progress on the route as well as try the moves first hand. As predicted, the

climbing was desperately sustained after the first 10m and highly unusual for a slate slab as McHaffie describes:

'The majority of the holds on *Meltdown* are side-pulls or under-clings making for a lot of unusual moves. Some of the hardest moves are halfway up but unfortunately the true lead cruxes come in the last quarter. It's a real head game up there and requires a lot of sport fitness not normally required on slabs.'

After a sustained period of attempting the route and some frustrating initial red-point attempts McHaffie finally succeeded in making the first ascent of this already legendary test-piece. Commenting afterwards, McHaffie was in awe of Dawes' highpoint in 1986, suggesting that his link up to the finishing crux could well have been the hardest piece of climbing achieved in the world at the time.

With the resurgence of interest and development in slate climbing in recent years Ian Lloyd-Jones, one of the quarries' most ardent devotees and recent developers, decided to see what potential Twll

THIS PAGE: Ian Lloyd-Jones among the wavy grooves of the second pitch of *Black Holes and Revelations* (6b, 7a), during the first ascent, Twll Mawr. RAY WOOD

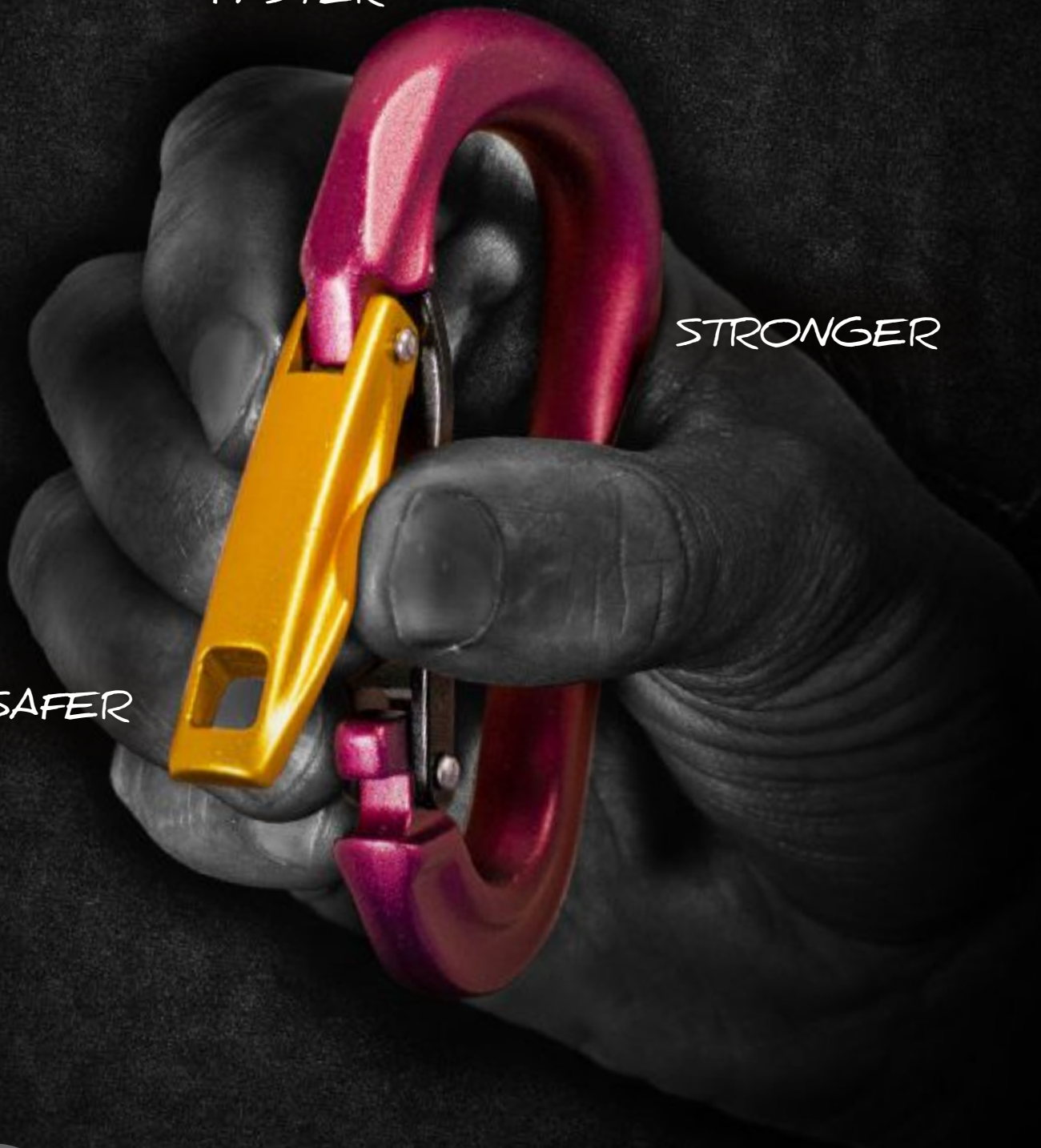
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The crux gear consisted mainly of gaffa-taped-on slings

- Mark Dicken

Mawr had for sport climbing. He first established a series of three pitch sport routes on the previously under developed south wall of the hole which mainly tackle excellent corner's and arête's on good quality slate. Next on the list was a new route skirting The Quarryman Wall which he called *The Rock Bottom Line*. This route deviously winds its way up from the very bottom of the hole to two excellent pitches up a technical groove and tough top wall to form the longest multi pitch 7b+ in the UK.

My most recent forays into Twll Mawr have taken me back to where it all started for slate climbing: on the north wall, and following in Joe Brown's tradition of ground up new routing. This predominantly traditional wall covers some really adventurous terrain; the climbing is never desperate but can often be worryingly off balance and without good protection. Mark Dicken has been enthusiastically plugging away at new routes on this wall for years and I was invited along to the most recent line he spied which would be 'around E4 in difficulty'.

Six metres away from my last piece of protection, I was cursing Mark and his conservative grade estimates. The high temperatures had heated up the slate and it felt too precarious to hang around to place the crucial wires before the crux roof. I down-climbed with a tensioned rope from a skyhook to the relief of the belay ledge, happy not to have fallen off the awkward unprotected climbing. This innocuous-looking pitch packed a big punch and it was great to return the following day to finish off the job in cooler temperatures with a more 'go for it' mentality.

Twll Mawr is an amazing venue with fantastically varied climbing and something that will appeal to most climbers operating from around E2 or 6c respectively. It has a fantastic atmosphere and the views of Snowdon make it one of the 'must visit' climbing venues of the UK if you're into multi-pitch sport or trad climbing. The Quarryman Wall itself has climbing that should appeal to a worldwide audience, and it remains a mystery to me why more climbers don't attempt these historic and classic routes from the eighties that still pack as strong a punch today as they did thirty years ago.

THIS PAGE: Dan McManus in the zone on the first pitch of *The Quarryman* (E8 7a). The groove pitch gets all the attention on but this opening pitch is sustained and runout 6c climbing. **FACING PAGE LOWER:** Pitch five of *Tân y Ddraig* (180m 6b, 6a+, 6a, 6b, 7a, 6a+) on the North Wall of Twll Mawr: Ian Lloyd Jones making the first ascent in May this year. **FACING PAGE TOP:** In-flight entertainment for Calum Muskett provided by pitch 3 of *The Wonderful World of Walt Disney* (E6 6b). ALL RAY WOOD





A Walk On The Wild Side

MARK DICKEN TALKS TO JOE BROWN ABOUT TWLL MAWR

Growing up, I dreamt of being Indiana Jones: I had the hat and everything. My early climbing adventures were full of rock and vegetation hurled to the wind. 1992 brought me a ticket to ride; I started university, got into a minibus and sped off to North Wales. It also brought us the Little Black Book of Slate. Adventure awaited, but as a solid HVS leader at the time, most of the quarries seemed out of my reach. One HVS stood out, though; Twll Mawr's *Opening Gambit*.

Ten years and many epics later, my mighty Triumph Acclaim rattled along the A5 for an appointment with Twll Mawr. My wingman Tom had been bundled in on the promise of 'a good adventure' with minor mention of the major rockfall that blitzed the lower half. Or the high price one unfortunate paid when misreading its start.

After many hours, one wrong turn, and much fear, we summited in the drizzle, shell shocked and spent. The trusty Acclaim got us to the Vaynol with 10 minutes to spare before the bell rang. Cuddling pints, we stared long into the distance: seven hours mainlining adventure had taken its toll. However, I was hooked and my love affair with the slate quarries and Twll Mawr in particular had begun.

Twll Mawr offers the adventurer much that is unique for the quarries, and therefore in climbing in general: an unbroken face of Dinorwig slate over 400ft high, and with a sunny aspect. Strong lines abound here, often hidden in plain sight waiting to be unlocked through bravery and bloody mindedness.

One such adventurer who made the back wall his own was the British climbing legend

Joe Brown. He and Claud Davies 'discovered' Twll Mawr in 1972. That year they probed the back wall countless times, sometimes successful, but often beaten back by weather or hostile rock. The three routes established in this year of onslaught made an indelible impression, and they returned to repeat them many times over the next decade, eventually adding two more routes some eleven years later. All of these routes are massive characterful adventures, and should be on the bucket list of every climber who considers 'epic' to be a good thing.

It took another seven years for another team to establish a new line on the Back Wall: *True Finish* was the creation of Chris Dale and Graham McMahon, when the quarries were in the midst of another boom. Seeking to gain the obvious and attractive sharp hanging arête above the initial pitches of *Razor's Edge*, this ground up adventure climbed up into the dead-end bay on its right. Bold climbing saw them at the top of the crack on its right margin. Joe's original vision of the 'true finish' was slightly left of here, a line subsequently followed by *The Baron* in 2015.

The 90s came and went and slate and its less mainstream adventures fell out of favour with the climbing public. Poor guide descriptions, bird banned approaches, and the effect of rockfall on the initial pitches meant the back wall of Twll Mawr got very little traffic. During 2003-2008 I pretty much had it to myself. *Taith Mawr* (meaning 'Big Journey') was my first new route

in Twll Mawr. The basic premise was to get from Watford Gap to Kyber Pass in as linear and amenable fashion as possible. We started up *Opening Gambit* as the Quarryman wall was a bit stiff. Again I had an excellent wingman (who I assured it would all be about HVS), in Jon Byrne. Jon not only came along for the second chapter after an initial benightment, but continued to talk to me after seconding crux pitches whose gear mainly consisted of gaffa-taped-down slings, as well as obscure sections such as the 'limbo dyno' and the 'flying campus'. The resulting route was a mighty ten pitches (almost 300m long) and yet to be repeated. I recently spoke to Joe Brown about his special relationship with Twll Mawr.

M.D. When did you first think about climbing in Twll Mawr?

J. B. Well as soon as the slate quarries stopped working, within probably a week or two, people started to go into them exploring, but not to climb. They went to get trophies! Lots of the old Welsh climbers have tools, stools, and all sorts of things that the quarrymen used, and they were collected as really desirable things.

We went out for a day messing about in the quarry, in those days before the dam scheme, there was a huge pinnacle which actually started down by the lake (Yr Ceiliog, or Trango Tower). We called it the Aiguille de Nant Peris. It was just a day tour going up over that, you climbed over the top, dropped down the other side on to the scree, then you went where you wanted to. On this particular day we did that, walked up the scree, and there was a tunnel. We went in and Claude said there was a door blocking it. Once you went in there was a bright light shining at you. We

TOP LEFT: Calum Muskett making the second ascent of another Dawes route on the West Wall, *The Dyke* (E6 6a). **LOWER RIGHT:** One of the hardest slab routes in the world, *The Meltdown* (8c+/9a). It was James McHaffie in 2012 who finally laid to rest Dawes' great unfinished project. ALL RAY WOOD





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went carefully because we didn't have a torch, and eventually we came to a pile of boulders. What you were looking at was light shining on a surface from above. We climbed up through this boulder choke and we were in the bottom of the big hole. That was just so awesome, because you never ever approach an unknown crag like that. Suddenly your eyes are opened and there you are at the bottom of a 650ft face that no one had ever tried to climb. It was just stunning.

So Opening Gambit was the first climb?

No, *Hamadryad* was the first one we attempted, but having run into trouble on it, we traversed leftwards and got on to what became *Opening Gambit*.

How the hell did you traverse across that? I supposed its changed a lot?

The present floor level of Twll Mawr is a hundred feet above where we started [due to a rock avalanche], so there was at least 120ft of climbing to get to that. It was perfectly clean climbing with very few loose stones anywhere; the only problem was there were practically no runners at all. When we got to the corner, which was obviously going to be the crux, there was a perfect jamming crack. In my opinion it used to be the best route of its standard in Britain: it has perfect rock, and it was all the same standard. The only thing that spoiled it was the lack of runners. It's changed so much with that rockfall.

So the line that was your first goal was Hamadryad?

Yes it was. The line was obvious, what you had to work out was how you could get over this manky rock which was the entrance into the crack. That was before friends. Once you got into the crack

We were looking at this light shining from above. We climbed through a boulder choke and we were in the base of this big hole. It was just so awesome.

- Joe Brown

proper there was no problem. The problem was the gorse bushes! There was some huge gorse bushes, and bloody difficult to get past. The bolts I had put in were 6mm bolts, about inch and a quarter long. They were very doubtful fall holders. Putting them in was a lot of bloody effort, especially on *The Razor's Edge*.

You had quite a few goes to get The Razors Edge?

I remember climbing up to the chain which was a full-on pitch, then up the next pitch. The first attempt was with Claude, and I'm pretty sure we got up to the slabs, but I'm not absolutely certain. Then I went back with Pete Crew, I think I went fairly high, and came back again.



LOWER LEFT: The modern approach into Twll Mawr through the Golgotha Tunnel. IAN PARNELL **TOP:** Calum Muskett making the lunge for the top on the first ascent of *Fleur-de-lis* (E6 6b). RAY WOOD

On my third attempt, I went up on to the slabs, and it started to rain, with no runners. I was with Alan Hunt then: he was quite reasonably very gripped! I didn't have a runner, so I had to just down-climb it. The next attempt was with Claude, and that was it, we did it. It was fantastic in those days, if you went in there; there was no chance of anybody else being in there with you. Also because of the way it faces, south east, it just gets hot. It was fantastic, I loved it.

The slopy climbing in Twll Mawr, you don't really get it anywhere else in the quarries, do you? No, I'm trying to think of other places with similar climbing, but nothing compares to that.

The start of your route Scorpion has got quite loose recently.

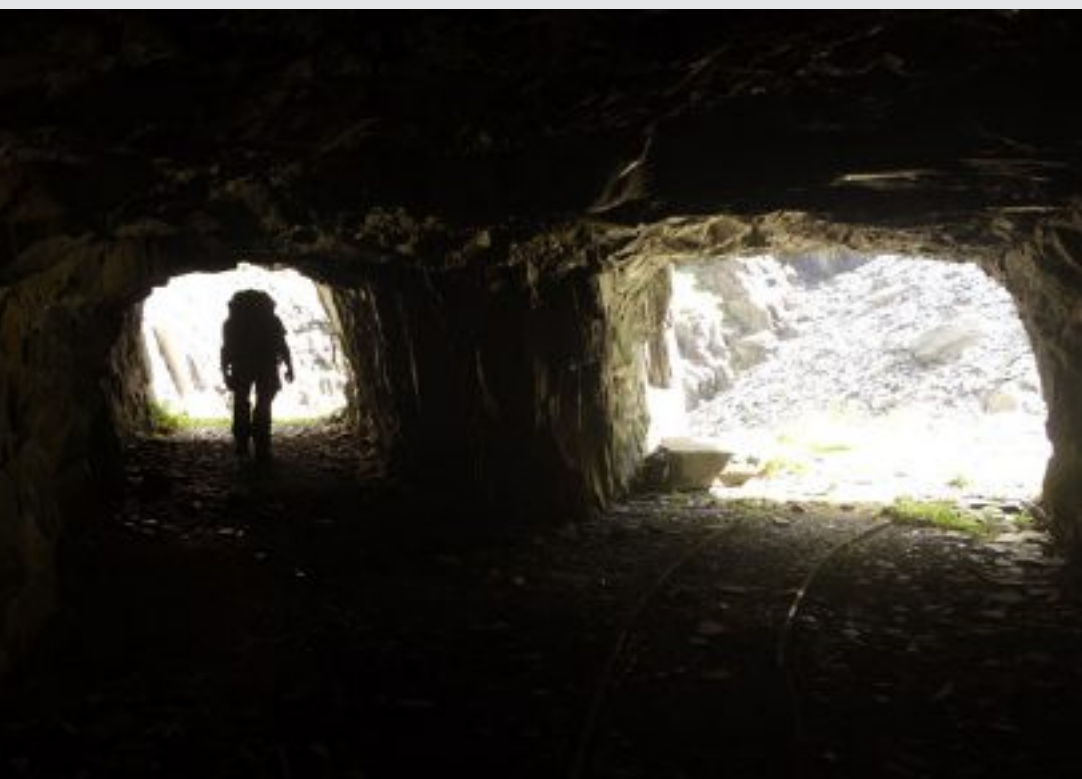
I don't remember it being rubble at all, perhaps the rock avalanche has affected it. But it wasn't all difficult climbing, it was just the top (crux) pitch.

The first free ascents of most of the previously aided routes were done by Stevie Haston, but he didn't free all of them. He didn't free *Bushmaster*, where you climb up a really super slab with a thin crack into a groove to do a sort of thin mantelshelf move, which I thought was alright.

When Stevie freed them on consecutive days, he'd said all of them were E2 or E3. I'd given them grades like VS and HVS.

It must have been special, pioneering those routes in Twll Mawr.

I've had the advantage of living through the best period in British climbing if you liked doing new routes. What makes these big slate routes special is they're more adventurous than ordinary routes. What I've got out of my life, if you're a climber... I think you'd be hard pressed to get a better one.





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Photo: Is it winter yet? Josh Huckaby steps up his training behind the Crooked Creek Station, White Mountain Research Center, California. Ken Etzel © 2015 Patagonia, Inc.

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BAD TO THE BONE

PUSHING ALPINE LIMITS IN REMOTE ALASKA

EARLIER THIS YEAR, JONATHAN GRIFFITH AND WILL SIM STARTED UP THE UNCLIMBED 2000 METRE NORTHWEST FACE OF MOUNT DEBORAH WITH JUST THE PACKS ON THEIR BACKS AND A BELIEF IN EACH OTHER. THE NEXT THREE DAYS WOULD PUSH THEM TO A PLACE FAR BEYOND LOGIC AND REASON: A PLACE WHERE IT TAKES SOMETHING ELSE TO SUCCEED

STORY | WILL SIM

PHOTOGRAPHY | JONATHAN GRIFFITH

CROSSING A BERGSCHRUND IS ALWAYS A MEANINGFUL AFFAIR. THE CRACK FORMED BY A GLACIER CREEPING AWAY FROM A MOUNTAIN IS OFTEN THE FIRST HURDLE BEFORE CLIMBING BEGINS. IT'S THE FIRST LEVEL OF COMMITMENT, THE SYMBOLIC ACT IN WHICH YOU MAKE THE FIRST MOVE. JON'S HESITANT MOVEMENTS WERE TELLING ME ALL I NEEDED TO KNOW. A FEW MINUTES PRIOR, TWO AVALANCHES HAD SWEEPED EITHER SIDE OF THE COULOIR WE WERE NOW ENTERING. I WAS SCARED: IT FELT TOO MUCH LIKE LOOKING DOWN THE BARREL OF A LOADED GUN. BUT IT WAS REASSURING TO KNOW THAT JON WAS ON THE SAME LEVEL. 'IT'S NOT WORTH IT, LET'S HEAD DOWN' WAS ALMOST SAID BY BOTH OF US. YET AN URGE WAS WORKING AWAY IN OUR MINDS, THAT INNER FIRE YOU CAN'T EXPLAIN - A VACUUM THAT SOMEHOW PULLS YOU UPWARDS. TWO LONG STRIDES AND I WAS OVER THE 'SCHRUND: TIME TO CLIMB

'If ya get it in, it's any drink for free, go on, no cheating!' sniggered the barmaid, her thousand yard stare and involuntary twitches suggesting a past of too many years spent in such end-of-the-road Alaskan hives.

I perched forward on the bar stool, worked my fingers for the optimum grip of the screwed up dollar bill, and squared myself up with the jar on the far side of the bar. Visualising the arc of my arm, the release of my fingers, and the flight path of the bill, I felt it was on. Flick.

It was clear I'd messed it up as soon as the paper left my finger tips. What did this mean for our trip? I'd told myself that getting the

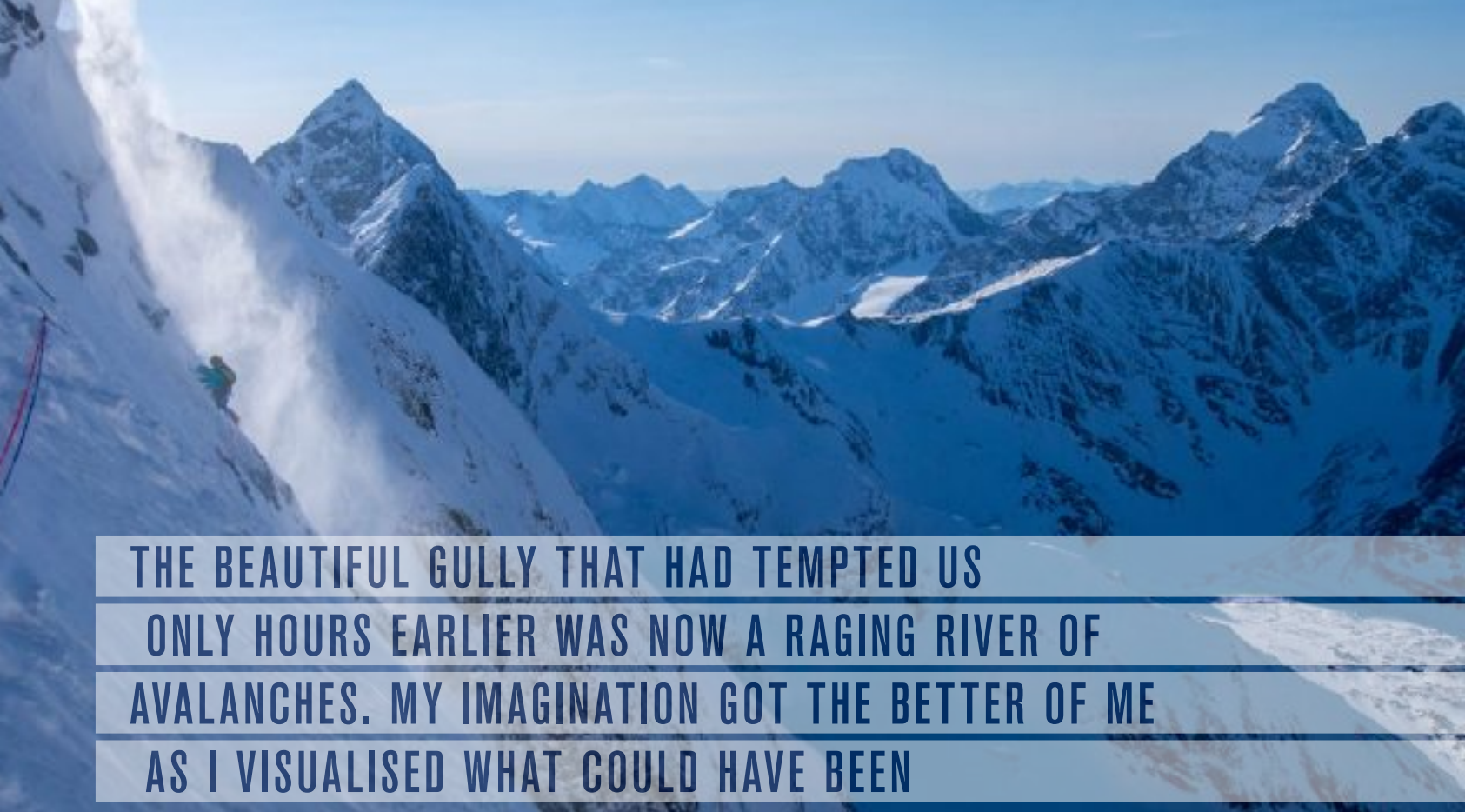
dollar bill in the jar would be a good omen. I felt betrayed by the screwed up dollar now lying between empty bottles of spirits and dead flies.

Since arriving in Alaska a week before, most of our time had been spent drinking, playing with Jon's drone and pondering how we would get to the bottom of Mount Deborah. Finding a pilot prepared to take us had led us to this dark, seedy hole of a pub somewhere on the trans-Alaskan highway; a place where people looked suspiciously happy given their bleak surroundings. We were here to meet Alex, a helicopter pilot from Fairbanks, who said he could take us, but not before we helped him fix a

helicopter with a dented rotor blade (apparently the dart that had damaged it had been meant for a Caribou). Hundreds of days tied together on big mountains has given Jon and I a synergy in our partnership. But it's now, in the high tension, boredom-filled down time on an expedition when a partnership is truly tested. I'd lured Jon north once again with a grainy image from Google Earth of a 2000 metre spiky face protruding from an icy range he had never heard of. Now, with our chances of even seeing the mountain looking slimmer and slimmer, I could sense his irritation through the cloudy Alaskan IPA that had fuelled us this far.

THIS PAGE: Will Sim approaching Mount Deborah's summit in high winds. JONATHAN GRIFFITH





THE BEAUTIFUL GULLY THAT HAD TEMPTED US ONLY HOURS EARLIER WAS NOW A RAGING RIVER OF AVALANCHES. MY IMAGINATION GOT THE BETTER OF ME AS I VISUALISED WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

In the last week of April, Alex had dropped us off on the inhospitable Gillam glacier in the notoriously isolated Hayes Range of Alaska. For three days a storm had engulfed us, destroying our basecamp. We'd struggled to meet each other's gaze as we sat in our bedraggled bivi tent, bracing the walls and wincing every time we heard the roar accelerate from down the valley. With our main tent lost and all our gear now buried under metres of snow, I was half expecting to call Alex for a pickup once the winds abated. Failing on expeditions is something you have to accept, but calling it a day before even putting on our harnesses would be hard.

Steep, plastic ice reared up before us. 'The first third looks skiable' I'd said days earlier when studying this section through binoculars. What an idiot, I thought. Commenting on difficulties before you get there is a fool's game. Thankfully the ice was squeaky and friendly, despite the big bags trying to snap my Achilles' tendon. Standing at a belay for more than five minutes was unpleasant. We were both wearing down trousers underneath our hard shells, which means it was cold, even by Alaskan standards.

A month earlier, I'd reluctantly held my phone to my ear as she talked of faith; a voice, a feeling. It made me angry that she was happy to shape her life around a belief she knew defied rationality. Right then, I could kid myself that I was different. That my life was structured around logical thought, clear decisions, and a pragmatic consciousness. That I didn't have an inner voice which you can't quite explain. And that I never handed my life over to an urge or

unaccountable feeling. But now a third of the way up the face, as we entered a coliseum of black shale, my own carefully weighed thoughts began to move away from pure reason to a deeper current of consciousness, where reason and logic give way to a more primal instinct.

Where we'd expected to climb low angled ice were huge roofs, ten metres across, barring entry to the upper face. To the left a beautiful steep gully arced upwards; it was a fine line and I could tell we were both tempted. After a swerve of indecision, I chose right. Thin smears through rotting black rock were the most attractive option.

Taking over for a block of easy angled ice, I climbed nervously. I couldn't do more than three moves before craning my head back and taking in the view upwards. Don't look up. Looking down is comforting. In the distance our snow hole that saved the day during the storm is now in full sun. We have bacon and eggs there, whiskey and music. Looking upwards is terrifying. Keep bluffing, I told myself.

From nowhere, the world erupted in a deep, ear-splitting bang. I cowered and made myself small as I anticipated the unknown event heralded by this terrifying sound. A sonic boom is caused by an object compressing sound waves as it passes through Mach 1 at just under eight hundred miles an hour. Alex had told us that the U.S. air force used the hundreds of miles of tundra to our north for training exercises in F16's. It seemed wrong that our only other human interaction had to be so violent, shaking our already frazzled nerves.

I crawled the last few metres on to the crest of the northwest ridge, as the sun skimmed

the horizon and glowed with its last life of the day. The sugary snow on top of black ice had soaked energy from our fading bodies in a way that steep technical climbing never does. We'd been on the run for hours, since we made the decision to escape the apex of the face, leave the dream line and seek shelter. On reaching the upper section of the face, the snowfields above had come alive, shedding their weight down our line. The beautiful gully that had tempted us only hours earlier was now a raging river of avalanches.

My imagination got the better of me as I visualised what could have been. The couloir above us – our planned escape through the headwall – was in a similar state of chaos. I wouldn't let my imagination go there. An exhausting traverse with an unexpected thin crux gully had seen us out to the ridge. It was earlier than we wanted, but welcomed entirely.

It was the very early hours of the morning by the time we were both inside our little bivi tent, perched precariously yet securely on the Northwest ridge. Trying to sit up and tend the stove was the new challenge, as cramps attacked my back and stomach. Jon did an amazing job as usual, of organising and sorting our perch as we fought to keep our eyes open.

Although pleased with our progress, we were also in disbelief that we were here. An inexplicable decision to carry on, when rationality was saying no, had found us halfway up this beautiful cold mountain. The short Alaskan night was now upon us: you could hear a pin drop, and the wafer-thin layer of pertex encasing us allowed us to forget our precarious situation and descend into a careless trance.

'Should we take the poles down? Will, shall we take the poles down!?' Jon yelled at me. The roar was back, thunderous and full of fury. I woke from my short, intense sleep to see the walls of the tent being tested to their limit once again. The fabric against the poles looked like a shopping bag caught in a fence. The difference was that we weren't on the security of the glacier anymore, but a thousand meters up a 2000 metre unclimbed bit of a mountain. Before I could answer I must have fallen back in to my coma, as this is all I can remember.

Once again the pure beauty of the Alaskan wilderness was startling. We straddled the crest of the northwest ridge like ants clinging to a writhing animal. A reptilian spine of ice thrust from the sub-Arctic tundra. Two weeks earlier we'd stood on a hill near Fairbanks and seen this razor ridge piercing the skyline some hundred miles distant, and now it thrilled me to think we were on it. To our south, the Yanert glacier, an anarchic mess of seracs, crevasses and freshly fallen debris was an unsettling sight. This was our way down and the first time we'd seen it in the flesh. In my mind's eye, I could see Heinrich Harrer, Fred Beckey and Henry Meybohm weaving their way through this maze when they made the first ascent of Deborah. On the other side of the Yanert, the south summit looked tantalisingly close in the eye-watering clear air common to such cold, high latitude places. I imagined what it would be like to see some dots top out over there from the huge unclimbed south face. Then I stopped dreaming.

There's no one else here.

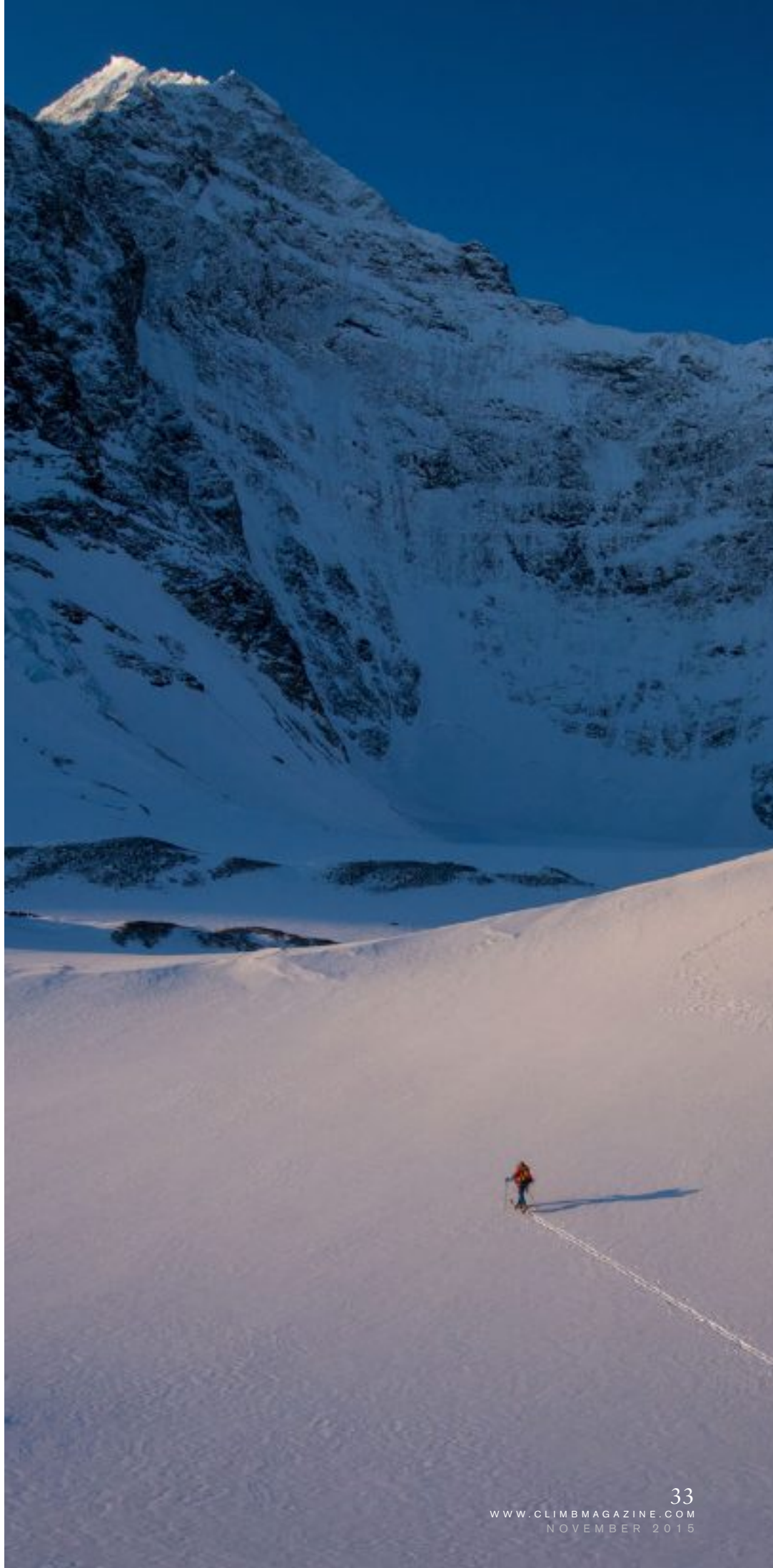
Getting going had been hard work, as it always is, but with the summit nearly visible we feel the pull of success and tap back in to the upward stream. 500 metres of easy mixed ground saw us moving freely. When only hours previously one more step had to be forced from inner strength, it was now with relative ease we moved over the only friendly ground of the route so far.

I've done it again, and been carried away thinking I can make the next level section of the ridge, we're now moving together with no ice screws between us. Our umbilical of trust no longer has comforting doglegs of protection along its length, and hangs almost freely for 20 metres. It's snow climbing, so what's the fuss? But these horizontal corniced beasts are where bad things happen. I'll take some water ice any day. 'Don't fall Jon, don't trip, not now' I pray.

'Let's call this the summit' I said to Jon when we were close, yet far enough from the summit cornice. Six almost horizontal, hundred metre pitches had seen us along the most involved part of the upper northwest ridge. The wind was back, stinging our eyes and sending impressive swirls of ice crystals in to shining vortexes, like breaking surf on a windy day.

THIS PAGE: It's big and bad: shortly before the moment of commitment. JONATHAN GRIFFITH

FACING PAGE: Will Sim battling through spindrift avalanches on the northwest face. JONATHAN GRIFFITH





IT'S NOT ALL MATHS AND SCIENCE.
THERE ARE THOSE RARE MOMENTS WHEN
NOTHING MORE THAN A BLIND BELIEF TAKES CONTROL

Clinging to the rocks on the south side, we avoided the house-sized cornices and two thousand metre drop to the north. It hadn't let up, extending in to the blue horizon every time we reached a levelling. I imagined Dakers Gowan and Charles Macquarrie popping their heads over the cornice from their tenacious 12 day epic on the north face in 1977. Times change. If we spent 12 days on a route now it would be because something went wrong. Back then they just knuckled down; it was normal.

A summit can be a moment of elation, but more often than not there's other things on your mind. I was anxious about the descent: 500 metres of abbing and downclimbing a steep, sun-baked slope would see us over what looked to be a large 'schrund and on to the Yanert icefall, which would have to be navigated to a point where we could re-ascend a few hundred metres to gain our bivi on the northwest ridge. The next day we would then have a ridge about a mile long to traverse, before 800 metres of abseiling down to the Gillam glacier on a nastily cross-loaded face. Once down, we would walk for a few kilometres to the base of the route and collect our skis before gliding down to our snowhole, food and satisfaction.

The purr of our stove was as good a soundtrack as any. The backdrop of a thousand

jagged peaks under a setting sun needed no superlative to describe it. Content, but shattered, we sat at our bivi, pleased that the south facing summit slope hadn't parted the mountain and taken us with it.

'What do you think?' I asked Jon as I scrolled the screen of my camera, enlarging shots of the ridge we now stood on taken from base camp days earlier. Having identified a gully that seemed to have the least objective hazard, we were now trying to find it from above. Committing to the best of some bad options, Jon lowered himself into the void beneath. Large cornices drooped like wet grass as we set up one inventive rap after another; V threads in neve, a cam in a decomposing crack. Alarm bells were ringing now. The end was in sight, but we were riding the fine line between fast and careless. 'Let's just keep it together, slow down, play the long game' I told myself.

I wait for the euphoria. The elation-pitched scream. The joy, the glee, and the party. Then I remember what I always forget about these experiences. That they're not a quick fix or an innocent high, but a deep, thoughtful process. One which slowly rewards you with time and contemplation. Collapsed in a heap outside our snow hole, we stare up at our face, it's top half bathed in amber light. We know a hundred times

more about it than we did three days previously, and see it with different eyes. Our minds turn to a cloud of lazy, happy thoughts with each sip of whisky.

That irrepressible feeling of dread we felt when first stepping on the face three days previously was now a distant memory which we could let slide, pretend hadn't happened and attribute success to fine-tuned decision making. However, I feel that would be missing a fascinating part of climbing in the big mountains: an arena in which you would rarely climb anything if you don't hand yourself over to something else.

As climbers, we like to talk about calculated risks and margins of safety. This is what keeps us alive and coming back for more. But I also think we gloss over the times when we listen to something else. Call it intuition, inner fire, or just pure determination. But it's not all black and white, maths and science. There are those rare moments when nothing more than a blind belief takes control.

The more I climb, the more I wonder if it is possible to have success in the big mountains without having a degree of faith.

THIS PAGE: Will Sim feeling the pressure high on Mount Deborah's northwest ridge. JONATHAN GRIFFITH

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Athlete: Will Sim
Photo: Jon Griffith
Location: Mt. Deborah, AK

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THIS PAGE TOP:

Will Sim traversing out from the northwest face of Mount Deborah with the wilderness of the Hayes Range stretching into the distance beyond.

LEFT:

The aftermath of the base camp storm.

RIGHT:

Trying to keep fuelled high on Deborah.

BELOW:

Starting off with the steepness of the northwest face looming above.

ALL JONATHAN GRIFFITH



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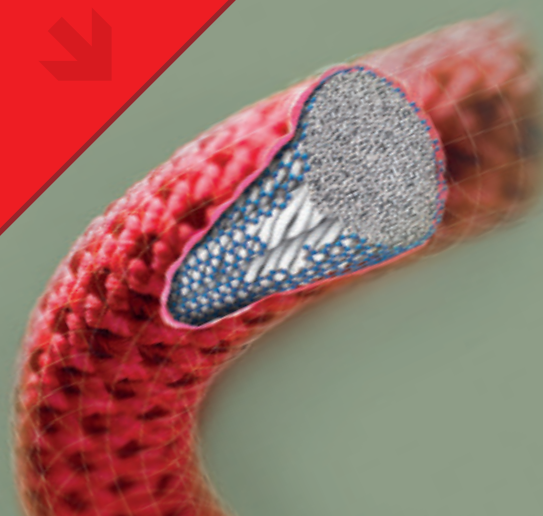
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The Cirque of The Unfallen

A SHORT STORY BY DAVID PICKFORD

FROM HIS NEW BOOK *AFTER THE CRASH AND OTHER STORIES*

In the distance, cloud had started to build above the high crags that ran along the edge of the cirque. She reached for a blue ripple in the granite wall that ran strong and thin as a human vein over the rough grey stone. At its apex, the fingers of her left hand closed on a small edge.

It was enough, but only just.

Pulling hard on the edge, she ran her feet up to the sloping shelf and stood in balance for the first time in a hundred and forty feet.

The sun was falling fast towards a gap in the ridge more than three hundred feet above. Her rope disappeared down the steep slab beneath into the rising shadow of evening.

Where was the last gear that would hold a fall? She didn't know. Just above, a pair of choughs quartered out from the wall. As they ascended into space, their cries echoed for a while in the cooling air before falling silent.

The evening sky reeked with shifting light and omen.

The lichen under her fingers smelt of damp earth on an autumn night. Twenty feet above, a stunted pine grew out from the wall: the lone sentinel of this high tower that rose sharply for a thousand feet above a silver lake that gleamed between the trees beneath.

She swarmed up the final plinth above the sloping shelf and belayed to the pine, wrapping a sling around the base of the foot-wide trunk that disappeared into a small chimney.

Why was it growing here, this lonely tree? From where did it find water and nourishment? How did it survive the winter ice and snow?

She didn't know.

There was almost no rope left to take in. She took off her helmet and clipped it to the sling around the tree. Beads of sweat balled up on her straw-



coloured curls and ran down her bare arms and across the weathered skin of her hands that the high Sierra sun had turned to fired bronze. As she leaned back against the wall and took in the ropes, her chalk bag compressed against the stone and a cloud of chalk dust hung in the still air above the pine tree.

He started climbing almost immediately. No more than a few seconds elapsed between the ropes coming tight and starting to move again.

They had been climbing together for a long time now, the girl and the boy. Everything they did was intuitive.

Fifteen minutes later, he arrived at her belay on the pine tree, breathing hard.

'Nice lead' he said as he grabbed the gear she'd already racked on a sling that hung on the tree, ready for him to take.

'Your pitch looks harder' she replied. 'Look at that roof at the top the

upper arête. There's a thin crack, maybe small cams. That's it.'

'Hmm, yeah. Well, I guess we'll see.' He chuckled to himself as he got ready to climb again. It was a clever trick he used to calm his nerves.

She gave him a slow, deliberate wink of her left eye as he was about to set off up the pitch, as if to say she was ready, so he might as well get on with it. The one-eyed wink was her thing, but it had become their ritual before either of them went for a hard lead.

Twenty minutes later, he was at the top of the arête. The sun was almost touching the ridge on the other side of the cirque. He plugged a small cam in the crack in the roof and chalked up. He could see what looked like a good hold on the lip of the metre-wide roof. His left hand slipped a centimetre in a poor finger lock. He stabbed his left foot against the wall, torquing his fingers harder in the crack. It's now or never, kid, he said to himself.

He eyeballed the hold. He ran his right foot up to a high smear. Pulling outwards on the finger lock, he caught the small, sloping undercut at the back of the roof with the fingertips of his left hand. His right hand flew from the finger jam, making a lightning arc through the evening.

He hit the hold at the same time as his right foot exploded from the smear. His feet cut loose, and he caught the edge on the lip of the roof with both hands. His legs spun in a whirl beneath him, a lone ballerina suspended in space in mid-pirouette above the darkening void below.

The sky crackled with static electricity that made the tiny hairs on the back of his neck rise up as he hung there from the dragon-crest of the wall. Far to the southeast, thunderheads were building over Nevada. Beyond them and further out, in some lost region of the air, something was stirring.

On her belay down at the stunted pine, the girl glanced up towards the edge of the cirque as he disappeared from sight high on the arête above. Why did the tiny hairs on the bare skin of her arms and at the back of her neck rise up as soon as she was alone here? And was she really alone here?

She didn't know.

He ran out the ropes to a tiny ledge perched on the apex of the upper arête; an eyrie that looked out across the cirque and across the world below. The sun had fallen behind the ridge now, and the sky was shifting from blue to indigo. Long ribbons of dark cirrostratus were floating around the higher crags and were interspersed by vagrant rafts of rising vapour that blew opaque and strange through the low notch where the cirque dipped before the cliffs rose again to the north.

As she followed the pitch, a light wind picked up, blowing in slow gusts through the notch in the ridge. Far below, the surface of the lake hovered

at the edge of the forest. The quicksilver film of the dead calm water spread out like a slick of split mercury across the darkening fathoms of the mountains about him.

As he belayed her up, he shivered slightly in his windproof.

He knew of all the stories that other climbers had told about this place, about the strange things that happened after dark up here in the cirque. The sudden shadows moving on the ridge. The lost voices in the cloud. The presence in the air. And the whistle of the night wind from all directions.

She reached the ledge where he was belayed after twenty minutes of climbing in a flurry of laughter and curses. The lines of his face looked pale now in the fading light, she thought, and as keen as a hunting wolf. As she clipped in to the sling at the belay, he turned to her.

'See the inscription, just down there'. He pointed to the words etched into the granite at the base of the ledge.

*In the cirque of the unfallen
they who passed this way
will rise again*

'What the hell is that?' Her eyes darkened as she looked down at the inscription.

'It's kinda creepy'.

'It dates back to the early 70s. Two climbers disappeared somewhere on the ridge over there. It was the beginning of winter. There was a freak ice storm that came out of nowhere, apparently. Neither of the bodies was ever found. The inscription was cut by one of their friends, one of the old pioneers of the cirque, the following summer. Nobody knows who. The old guy who lives in that tumbledown shack by the road head told me about it. It's a legend among the older

folk in the high Sierra. That's why the local climbers are afraid of staying too late here. They think the dead climbers haunt this place at night.'

She stared at a gap in the cloud just above the notch in the ridge. The wind blew in quick eddies around them, back and forth, shifting and starting, then falling away before it suddenly rose up in a series of gusts that made a low whistle as they passed over the crest of the ridge above.

'We better get going, then' she said as she grabbed the gear that was hanging from a sling on the belay. 'I don't believe in any of that ghost story stuff. I'm a scientist, remember. Occam's Razor suggests it's all bullshit. As does the last five hundred years of human progress. Anyway, enough storytelling. Time to climb!'

'Okay, go for it' he said, glancing upward with a raised eyebrow. It was a gesture, she thought, to find out what really existed here, and what didn't.

She winked at him with her left eye as she set off up the final pitch.

Climbing fast, she hardly bothered to stop and place gear; just a solid cam in a horizontal break ten metres above the belay. She ran out the sixty metre ropes up a series of overlapping slabs all the way to the ridge.

Darkness was falling fast by the time she'd set up a belay in a jumble of blocks just under the upper crest of the wall. The shadows of the cirque had deepened into a sluice of jet-black liquid that swept westwards into the forest beyond the lake, which had become nothing more than the faintest pulse of pale light on the outer edge of the mountain's penumbra. Why did she feel so cold, all of a sudden?

She didn't know.

She saw the first of them as she took the ropes in tight and he began to climb. The outline was faint at first among the boulders that lay in the



notch of the ridge, but resolved into form as she stared towards it. She was transfixed by the strange appearance of another climber, as if he'd risen out of nowhere. He was tall and lean. He carried an old-fashioned backpack of the style used by climbers of a generation ago, and a long-handled ice axe with a wooden shaft was fastened to the side of the pack. His movements spoke of the careful and deliberate motion of an experienced mountaineer. Although his clothes were tattered and faded, he was unmistakably moving up the ridge towards her, a lost rider on the rising night.

As she continued to stare, the second figure appeared. Climbing just behind the man, she moved with the lithe, light and delicate gait of an athletic young woman. She was also carrying a backpack, which was slightly smaller than the man's though of the same style.

Now the girl could see the rope trailing between them. The two ends of the rope were coiled in loops around the shoulders of the two figures. The two of them were moving together slowly and carefully up the ridge. They were heading, it seemed, for the precise point at which she'd made the belay.

She shivered as waves of nervous electricity darted through her. The last words of the inscription on the ledge below suddenly came back to her:

*they who passed this way
will rise again*

In a trance of cold and mesmeric attention, she took the rope in through her belay plate and watched as the two figures climbed up the ridge. She could feel her partner's fast movements across the slab, invisible now in the darkness below, through the sudden release of tension on the rope

as soon she took in the slack. He would be here in less than a minute.

Would he believe her when she told him?
She didn't know.

The two climbers on the ridge below continued to make their way towards her as the wind blew a long streamer of pale cloud through the dark air between her position and theirs. This delicate thread of vapour stretched a thin grey line over the granite, defining the no-man's-land in the middle distance between her and the two figures. Somewhere in that forbidden tract of boulder and scree, the space between the past and the present suddenly collapsed and was no more part of the world up here. The insatiable mountain had consumed time itself for a while, just as it had consumed those who had once passed this way, and as it might consume others.

It was nearly dark when he arrived at the belay. His head torch beam made quick movements across the stone. High above them, in the centre of a black atrium revealed by the parting cloud, two stars began to blink.

Nothing visible below them now remained. The streamer of vapour was clearing fast, leaving the ridge dark and desolate under the sliver of a crescent moon that was rising above the boulders that lay on the crest of the cirque. Before they started down, the final strands of cloud were carried away eastwards by the wind, and the chill of the night began to fall across the unknown path of their descent.

After The Crash and other stories is published this month by Vertebrate Publishing (£9.95, paperback or £6.95, Kindle, Kobo, or Apple eBook edition)

David
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THIS PAGE: Unknown figure crossing broken ground near the summit ridge of Uhuru Peak, Tanzania.
DAVID PICKFORD



Dissent Route

THE THRILL

The sun beat down on the black slate, radiating from the rooftops in shimmering waves, and the skyline of Llanberis terraces blurred in the mirage. I lay in the square garden, eyes closed against the light, not daring to move. A breeze lazily flicked the air, barely shifting the oppressive warmth. The summer heatwave rumbled on.

The midday sun became unbearable and I stepped inside; the thick stone walls and tiled floors a cool relief. My eyes adjusted to the darkness of the room, but my head still throbbed

ENJOYING OUR EAGLE'S PERCH, LEGS DANGLING IN THE UPDRAFT, THE COOLER AIR WAS A WELCOME CHANGE TO THE HEAT OF THE MORNING. THE THRILL OF OUR SITUATION WAS REPLACED BY THE THRILL OF SOLOING

with the heat outside. Our afternoon's plan was rapidly abandoned. It would be foolish to run the Welsh 3000s with the temperature and humidity in the red. I couldn't begin to think about thrills in this heat.

The weather began to change, overcast and humid. A dark sky threatened, and black thunder clouds boiled on the horizon. We settled for a link-up of routes and running, a chance to stretch before the Alps; a mix of challenges.

Our shoes kicked up the dirt as we jogged uphill towards Cynr Las. The crag rose at the head of the cwm, steep grooves leading into the hollow eyes of *The Skull*. I was content to be in the mountains, a steady rhythm beneath my feet and sweat stinging my eyes. *Main Wall* traced the lines of weakness through the full height of the crag, but it grew steeper, rearing up as we approached. I kept my head down, ignoring the full height of the crag, and hungrily breathed in the humid air.

As John put on his rock shoes and chalk bag, I realised soloing in running shoes was not the best idea. I tried to relax, but my limited experience of climbing without a rope now left me wondering, uncertain of what was about to happen. It was



THIS PAGE: The thrill of moving free over sun-enchanted stone. DAVID PICKFORD

a relatively new area of experience for me, and I realised there could be no half-hearted attempt. I wiped my hands on my shirt, tightened my laces again, and started climbing.

I quickly relaxed into the demands of climbing, absorbed by the moves, unlocking the puzzle before me. The worries and mental chatter slipped away to reveal only a calm, necessary focus. The thought of being 'near' to the ground comforted me, but as I climbed higher I became aware of the drop beneath my feet. My bright red shirt matched my sunburnt cheeks, flushed hot.

I climbed, with John just behind, enjoying the sense of a dangerous thrill. The lack of ropes held my concentration. I knew I could climb this, but the knowledge of what would happen if I couldn't made me feel completely alive.

At the end of each pitch, we reached a square of comfort; a ledge to sit down on, but not to relax. I couldn't forget my position, with one hand always clasped to the rock. My mind wandered and I looked out from the mountain, delaying my leave from the relative safety. Chatting, enjoying our eagle's perch above the Llanberis Pass, our legs dangled in the updraft. The cooler air was a welcome change to the heat of the morning, but still humid and heavy. The thrill of our situation

was replaced by the thrill of soloing.

Eventually, we had to leave our square of horizontal and climb on. The route continued with interest, all the more exciting in soft running shoes. My fingers crimped hard against small edges, holding tightly as my feet rolled inside the shoes and the edges squashed uselessly against the rock. I wiped sweat from my hands again, envious of John's rock shoes and chalk.

The pitches didn't flow as I expected them to - more of a short burst of concentration between attempting to relax at each belay ledge. But I always stayed firmly on the edge. It was at once electrifying and refreshing, and a gentle numbness surrounded me as every hold was tested, tapped,

and treated with suspicion. Every flake we pulled on, every groove we climbed, we grew closer to the sky. I looked down and saw the grey scree and green grass far below.

The final slab was a perfect sprint for the top, the good holds giving comfort but vivid exposure, reminding me exactly where I was. I kept glancing up at John, proudly stood on top of the crag as it started to drizzle; glad to be back on the grey and green. I glanced down again, taking a final look at the hundred metres of heated air below, content and finally forgetting to be scared. At last, it was a delight to be running up easy ground in running shoes.

I flopped on the wet grass at the top just as the rain moved in; we had luck on our side today. Raindrops ran down my nose and dripped onto my hands as I sat, floating and satisfied. The red shirt had faded, dark from the downpour. I buzzed from the route, riding the thrill. John and I grinned at each other as we began to jog towards Snowdon.

'What's next?'

BY TOM LIVINGSTONE



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IAN PARNELL TALKS TO

ROLANDO GARIBOTTI

BORN IN THE SOUTHERN ITALIAN PORT CITY OF BARI, 44 YEAR OLD ROLANDO 'ROLO' GARIBOTTI HAS LIVED IN BARILOCHE, ARGENTINA, THE USA AND EUROPE, AND HAS MADE FAST AND STYLISH ASCENTS FROM THE CANADIAN ROCKIES TO ALASKA AND YOSEMITE. BUT IT IS THE FITZROY RANGE IN PATAGONIA TO WHICH HIS CLIMBING LIFE IS INEXTRICABLY TIED. BUILDING ON AN APPRENTICESHIP OF PATAGONIAN ASCENTS THAT STARTED AS A WAYWARD TEENAGER, IN 2005 HE UNLOCKED THE SECRET OF CERRO TORRE'S NORTH FACE TOGETHER WITH ITALIANS ALESSANDRO BELTRAMI AND ERMANNO SALVATERRA, COVERING MUCH OF THE GROUND SO CONTROVERSIALLY CLAIMED BY CESARE MAESTRI. THREE YEARS LATER, WITH AMERICAN COLIN HALEY, GARIBOTTI COMPLETED THE MUCH-COVETED TORRE TRAVERSE, CLIMBING STANDHARDT, HERRON, EGGER AND CERRO TORRE IN A SINGLE PUSH. OFF THE HILLS, GARIBOTTI HAS BEEN JUST AS ENERGETIC, WRITING THE DEFINITIVE PATAGONIAN GUIDEBOOK, DEVELOPING THE WEBSITE PATACLIMB.COM, AND TACKLING PATAGONIA'S BIGGEST CONTROVERSIES - MOST NOTABLY THE VERACITY OF MAESTRI'S NORTH FACE CLAIM. THIS HAS LED HIM TO BE BOTH LAUDED AND REVEILED BY SEPARATE FACTIONS WITHIN THE CLIMBING COMMUNITY. *CLIMB* CAUGHT UP WITH ROLO TO DISCUSS HIS CLIMBS AND IDEAS, AND WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE THOUGHT OF AS THE ANTI-CHRIST

Can you remember the first time you became aware of climbing? My family moved to Bariloche for political reasons, trying to escape the trouble that the military regime inflicted on all the bigger cities. Bariloche is located in a very beautiful area, with endless mountains and lakes to the north, south and west. As young kids we started hiking, then skiing, eventually backcountry skiing and mountaineering. Once I did my first and only climbing course, an ice climbing course, aged 14, there was no stopping. Climbing gave me the confidence I needed to survive high school's competitive and ruthless environment.

Who were your climbing mentors? At the time in Argentina there were still a lot of people doing things on a volunteer basis, something that is far from common today. As kids we greatly benefited from that. Once we started getting better at climbing it was harder to find mentors. We had one brilliant role model, Sebastian de la Cruz, who was a few years older and had talent to spare, but was unfortunately not much of a teacher. Peter Lüthi, a Swiss expatriate who was a very experienced alpinist, influenced me a lot. In copying him, I developed the skills that would become the foundation for everything that came afterwards.

I remember you answering an American magazine's question about your heroes by saying you didn't believe in them. Why? Marco Pedrini was a hero of mine growing up, but he died at 28, practicing a kind of Banzai alpinism that was obviously not sustainable. It took me a couple of decades to realize that his example could not be reasonably called a good example.

Was there an early climb that was a turning point for you? Soloing was perhaps the turning point. For whatever reason, I had a stomach for risk that

the other kids my age did not have. I was far more socially awkward, more of an outsider, so once I found my niche I latched on to it, and I haven't been able to let go since.

You've lived and been brought up in Italy, Argentina and America. Which do you feel most attached to? Which feels like home? Nowhere feels like home really. When people ask me where I am from, I respond confused. I tend to identify myself with more aspects of American culture than of any other. Although I grew up in Argentina, I spent a lot of very formative years in the US. Now living in Italy feels completely alien. In time, I hope to learn to appreciate the culture, the idiosyncrasies, but by then it will be time to move to another continent...

Can you remember your first climb in Patagonia and what impact it had? It was such a great adventure. I was 15 and my partner was just a year older. We climbed Aguja Guilauimet, the smallest of the granite towers. It took us three days. The descent was in a stronger storm than either of us had ever seen at that point. We lost one of the ropes, had a very marginal bivouac and my partner ended with frostbitten fingers. We were lucky to grow up in such an innocent time, when parents thought it was ok to send a group of eight teenagers down to Patagonia with a single adult to oversee them.

You first came to the wider climbing public's attention for your speed ascents on El Cap in Yosemite. What gave you the confidence to start up those multi-day aid walls with the belief you could climb them in a push? Initially I did not have the confidence to do those speed ascents of El Cap, but my partner, the late Aischan Rupp, did. From doing a lot of soloing I had the skills, I had the risk tolerance, even the know-how, but would have never dared had it not been for him.

The myth of Yosemite would have been a hard one to crack without his help. He had a very analytical mind and figured that if someone else could, so could he. He wasn't a particularly gifted climber, but his mind knew no bounds. That same fearlessness is what caused his demise. For one of his first serious alpine climbs, he went to do the north face of Matterhorn in the winter. A small mistake in the descent cost him his life.

Speed has often figured highly in your climbing. What attracts you to moving fast in the mountains? I'm not sure that this has been a conscious choice. We become prisoners of the things we can do well.

Were you ever tempted by the Greater Ranges? The honest truth is that I don't acclimatize all that well, at least not as fast and as well as my more capable partners, so it wasn't very appealing to try to fight my own genetics. I have guided enough on peaks like Aconcagua and Denali to know that adaptation to altitude is a gift I did not get.

In the 2004 American Alpine Journal you published 'A Mountain Unveiled', a forensic examination of Cesare Maestri's claim to have climbed Cerro Torre in 1959 via the Northeast Face. What motivated you to write it? In the late 1990s I started working on a guidebook for the Chalten Massif, work that 15 years later would lead to the publication of *Patagonia Vertical*. Until then I had been a Maestri and Fava defender - I was born in Italy after all - but my defence was uninformed and of a purely emotional nature. I knew the basics, but had never taken the time to analyse the information critically. Once I looked into it, it all fell to pieces and I had to change my position. Maestri's account is completely implausible. At the time the German climber and writer Tom Dauer had been working on a



THIS PAGE: Rolando Garibotti soloing *Naked Edge* in Eldorado Canyon, Colorado. **JIMMY SURETTE FACING PAGE:** Climbing the last pitch of the north face of Cerro Torre during the first ascent of *El Arca de los Vientos*. ALESSANDRO BELTRAMI

book about Cerro Torre and after a number of exchanges he convinced me to write a chapter for his book about the matter. That chapter was the basis for *A Mountain Unveiled*, which got greatly improved by John Harlin's rigorous editing (John was the AAJ's editor at the time).

Since the publication of your AAJ article, there has been the exposure that Maestri's claimed en-route photo of Egger is actually on the west side of the Standhardt Col. Do you think we will ever have a complete conclusion to the debate, or even a confession? The discovery of the photo showing them climbing west of Col Standhardt was huge. Finally we have a good idea of what happened during those seven days that are unaccounted for, the days that Maestri claims they spent on Cerro Torre's east and north faces,

because of witness accounts regarding Maestri's condition upon his return to basecamp. We knew that they had been in the mountains, not hiding behind a rock (like Christian Stangl), but what we did not know is where they had been. We knew they had not been climbing on the east and north faces of Cerro Torre as Maestri claims. What the photo proves is that they went west, crossing over Col Standhardt, descending 800m to the west, quite likely to try the west face, the line along which Walter Bonatti and Carlo Mauri had made such good progress a year earlier. This would have been a very reasonable choice for them. If you use examination and analysis, this case is closed. As far as a confession, I have never met Maestri, but everyone that knows him tells me he is far too proud to come clean.

Maestri still has a devout group of supporters. Why do you think that is?

A lot of these folks, people like mountain historian Mirella Tenderini, grew up with Maestri as their hero, so for them to doubt his claims is quite difficult. They believe him at an emotional level, because they hold him dear, but there is no reasoned argument behind their beliefs.

What are your thoughts on the idea that the myths of mountaineering, often embellished or perhaps even untrue, are a big part of the romantic spirit that attracts many climbers to the hills, and that to destroy them removes some of magic of mountaineering? Myth is a fancy word for bullshit. I see no romantic or magical value in believing things that we know not to be true. The magic in mountaineering is there alright, but it is not there on the basis of fictitious accounts that are presented as fact. The activity itself is rich enough that we don't need fantasy to make it more interesting. Read Voytek Kurtyka's account of his and Robert Schauer's Shining Wall attempt, read Markus Pucher's account of his free-solo of Cerro Torre in a storm, read Taeko and Yasushi Yamanoi's account of their attempt on Gyachung Kang, Jerzy Kukuczka's K2 account. Reality at every turn surpasses imagination.

When did you think seriously about trying the north side, and did your AAJ investigations help when you succeeded with Alessandro and Ermanno on *El Arca de los Vientos*? I was not interested in trying Cerro Torre from the north, but in early 2005 when I contacted Ermanno to try the SE ridge of Cerro Murallon, which I had tried two years earlier with Silvo Karo [it was eventually climbed in 2012 by Jerome Sullivan and partners], he suggested we go to Cerro Torre first, so we did. The research helped because I knew all the features by heart. I had hoped to try the north face from the bottom, but Ermanno convinced me to follow the obvious line of weakness: across the base of the north face, to the NW face, the north ridge and north face.

What was that ascent like? You were after all making not only the most coveted ascent in

Patagonia at the time, but climbing ground that had decades of myths woven around it? On the climb we did not have any sense that what we were doing was either a coveted ascent or that we were climbing through ground enshrouded with mystery. From time to time we would remark details about the terrain that further disproved Maestri's claims, but that is about it. On our first attempt we climbed carrying far more gear than I would have liked: three ropes, two pots, a GPS, many pitons, etc. We climbed reasonably fast and efficiently but bailed after 900 metres when Alessandro Beltrami and I got 'cold feet'. The weather was not that good and we got scared. Ermanno was unfazed. On our next go I convinced them to strip everything down and, with me on the lead and short-fixing every pitch, we managed to surpass our high point in a single day and reach the summit at the end of day two. When we joined the *Via dei Ragni*, along the west ridge, we swung leads, but lost lots of time because we failed to notice natural tunnels through the rime mushrooms. I finished the last pitch at 11pm in the middle of a snowstorm. We spent all night shivering in the summit with a big smile across our faces.

Ermanno is a legendary figure in Patagonian history. What did you learn from climbing with him? Climbing with Ermanno in Patagonia feels like cheating. He makes you feel so very safe. You know that should anything happen he will get you out of trouble. He is the alpine climbing version of Hellboy, the reluctant superhero in Guillermo del Toro's movie by the same name. He is unfazed by any dangers that come his way and has the ability to stay calm in even the most dire situations. He puts his head down and deals.

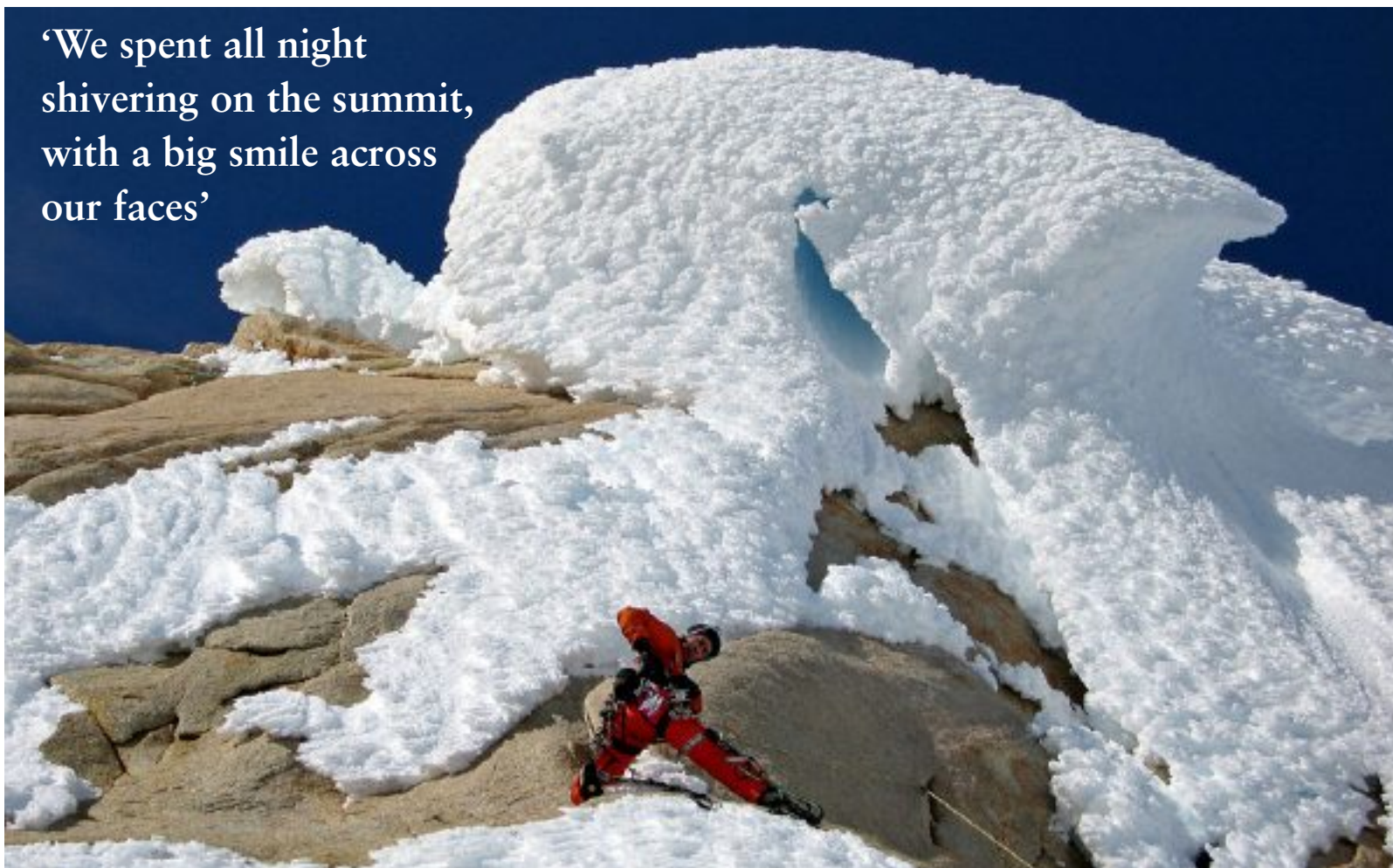
Two years later you completed the much tried Torre Traverse with Colin Haley. Why do you think you succeeded where others hadn't?

Strategy and planning was our forte. We knew exactly what to carry, how to move efficiently, had a good sleeping system and since I knew every section of the climb we could move across those ridges with little stress. Colin was a superb partner and has now left all of us in the dust. It was great to be able to pass along my know-how and then see him run with it. I wish I had met him 10 years earlier, but then that would have meant I would have been climbing with a 14 year old.

In 2012 Jason Kruk and Hayden Kennedy climbed the *Compressor Route* 'by fair means' and then chopped a significant number of the bolts. Had you considered chopping the bolts and what do you think of their actions?

We had discussed chopping the bolts with a number of people and had come to the conclusion that to minimise the fallout, the best strategy was to involve people that were representative of different communities: Ermanno, Colin, Carlos Comesaña, Bjorn-Eivind Aartun, Michal Pitelka, and myself. Comesaña, who did the second ascent

‘We spent all night shivering on the summit, with a big smile across our faces’



of Fitz Roy, offered to pay for helicopter support from his own pocket. It all would have been difficult to coordinate, but the plan was sound and the reaction would have been vastly different had we followed through. At around the same time I had come to realise that it was possible to chop the bolts ‘figuratively’, in writing, without touching them. That is when I started publishing Cerro-Torre-non-Compressor-Route ascent lists and dismissing the *Compressor Route* ascents as ‘bucket-list tourism’. This seemed like a good strategy, similar to what has been done on Everest, where you have the list of ‘high altitude tourist ascents’, with oxygen and Sherpa support and opposite it you have the list of ‘actual ascents’, with no oxygen and self-supported.

Regarding Hayden and Jason’s actions, I had no bearing on them, having never talked to them about the subject, but the minute it happened, and although I would have never done what they did the way they did, I jumped in to defend them, to support them, to take some of the pressure off them. To some degree it worked, and so in some circles I became an anti-Christ.

There was a huge reaction both for and against. You were close to the centre of that storm. What was that like? For a discussion or exchange to be productive people need to stay on topic and

stay away from personal attacks. Neither of these two things happened. People can call me all the names they want, can cut my car tires (as they did) and I will still go to bed and sleep soundly. However, if someone can argue counter points that make me realise that, conceptually, my conclusions are erroneous, then I will lose sleep. Since the advent of the internet anyone even minimally representative has had to learn to ignore uninformed and emotionally laden opinions, no matter how loudly and broadly they are broadcast. That said, I am very interested in the opinions of my peers and of those that can discuss a topic critically, with familiarity of every detail.

You presented your views strongly about both this controversy and the 1959 route. Why did you feel the need to take such a public stance? And what do you say to those who say it’s a personal vendetta against Maestri? The 1959 lie and the *Compressor Route* travesty are two very different topics that to me are unrelated. I would have had the same opinions even if they had involved two different people. It is about the issues and not the person. Regarding excessive bolting I took an equally critical stance against Kurt Albert and Bernd Arnold when in the late

90s they needlessly bolted a number of new routes in Patagonia (read the 2000 American Alpine Journal article *Patagonia: Looking Back Toward the Future*), against David Lama’s film team in 2009 and I have chopped my fair share of bolts in my home area. Regarding tall tales I have taken an equally rigorous line against Yves Astier’s claim to have soloed Fitz Roy, Alain Mesili’s claim of a new route also on Fitz Roy, and Ueli Steck’s far-fetched Annapurna claim. It has never been about the person, it has been about the issues, and I believe that over the years I have always taken a consistent stand. Maestri just happens to be someone who lied about an ascent, and who later placed a lot of unnecessary bolts.

Big questions were raised about who the mountains ‘belong to’: locals, visitors, the whole climbing community, or are they open to each individual to do as they wish? The mountains ‘belong’ to those that are most often in them. In some cases it is unfortunately guides, hence why commercial interests win (on Everest), in others it is climbers, sometimes local, sometimes foreign, sometimes a mixture of both. Being a ‘local’ in a certain mountain range is earned by way of climbing on it, not by the mere fact that you moved to the area or were born nearby.

‘There is plenty to do still. Most of the hardest walls have not been touched since the 1980s’

You run pataclimb.com, an online resource for Patagonian climbing, you’ve published the first comprehensive English language guidebook to the area, and helped publicise how to get accurate weather forecasts (something previously unheard of in the region). The result has been a flood of outstanding climbs in recent years, but also perhaps a diminishing in the myth of Patagonia as one of the world’s gnarliest mountain destinations. What are your feelings about that view? I do have mixed feelings about the negative effects of information. I started working on a guidebook to that area in the late 90s, and would have been able to publish it by 2001 or 2002, but I realised it was too early, so I put it in a drawer and waited. The area seemed still too wild and there was not enough crowding to require a dedicated guidebook. In 2009, when three ‘new’ routes were climbed over existing lines, we decided to put together pataclimb.com. By then the internet was in full swing and all the information seemed to be out there in one form or another, so it seemed time to put it out in an organized manner, with some editorial rigour. Three years later, after three different publishers asked to publish a paper version of it, we relented and decided to go ahead. Guidebooks have a double purpose: to provide information and to keep an historical record. My main motivation was the second.

Regarding the weather forecasts, publishing the know-how was a purely practical solution to being way too tired of way too many people coming to the house we shared with Bean Bowers to ask what the weather was going to be. You can be the ‘weather guru’ only for so long. Some days well over 20 people would pass by our house unannounced. It was fun, it was an enjoyable role to play, but at some point we needed time for ourselves. Still today, in spite of the website and the guidebook, I still get a half a dozen people a day that come by to ask for info. I have found ways to minimise it, but would never refuse. A more difficult conundrum and a huge responsibility is the tone in which you present the information. Do you scare your readers with endless warnings about the dangers involved, or do present the facts and leave the judgments to them? I am partial to the second.

You attempted the Fitz traverse with Colin, but ended up handing over your crampons to Tommy Caldwell and Alex Honnold as you retreated and they headed up on their successful ascent. Did that feel like a symbolic handing over to the next generation? The symbolism was invented by the film makers who put together the video of Tommy and Alex’s ascent. It enriched their story. Giving Alex my crampons was purely practical, as we were going down and they were continuing on. I had no use for my crampons and he needed them. Growing physical problems had already made me give up on any big climbing aspirations a few years earlier. Also, once people with the skill level of Hayden Kennedy came into the scene, it was obvious that it was time to stand aside. The role-change was not easy at first, but it has been very rewarding to fill new shoes, and to be behind the scenes, supporting younger climbers. I still enjoy my time in the mountains, but do so without much ambition beyond enjoying the moment.

Looking into the future, is there more to do in the Fitzroy range? What do you think might be possible? There is plenty to do still. Most of the hardest walls have not been touched since the 1980s and early 90s, in particular the south face of Cerro Torre, which is by a long shot the hardest face in those parts, probably one of the hardest big walls in the world. Other faces like the northwest face of Piergiorgio await alpine or capsule style ascents, and offer many hard new lines. Technically hard objectives have fallen out of favour because people have got into climbing in a very lightweight style, but in time the interest will grow again. As things have got easier, courtesy of communal know-how, weather forecasts, and de-mystification, it is only natural that the goal posts move, with an ever narrower goal. In most objectives it is about time to ditch jumars altogether and embrace a free-climbing only ethic. One of the most futuristic ascents I can think of is Nico Favresse and Sean Villanueva’s free ascent of the east face of Fitz Roy, leading and following every pitch free and onsight. An ascent does not get much cleaner or elegant than that. Both the *Torre Traverse* and the *Fitz Traverse* await free and jumarless ascents. ‘Anything goes’ alpinism seems rather pointless in this day and age.

THIS PAGE: Rolando Garibotti during an attempt to climb the South East Ridge of Cerro Torre by ‘fair means’ (i.e. without the ‘Compressor Route’s bolts). DOERTE PIETRON

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Here at the National Mountain Sports Centre we have a course that's perfect to help you develop, whatever standard you climb at. From complete beginner to performance climber, our coaches will help you take the next step, and help you get more out of your climbing. For more details, visit our website.



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FRESH IDEAS FOR WINTER

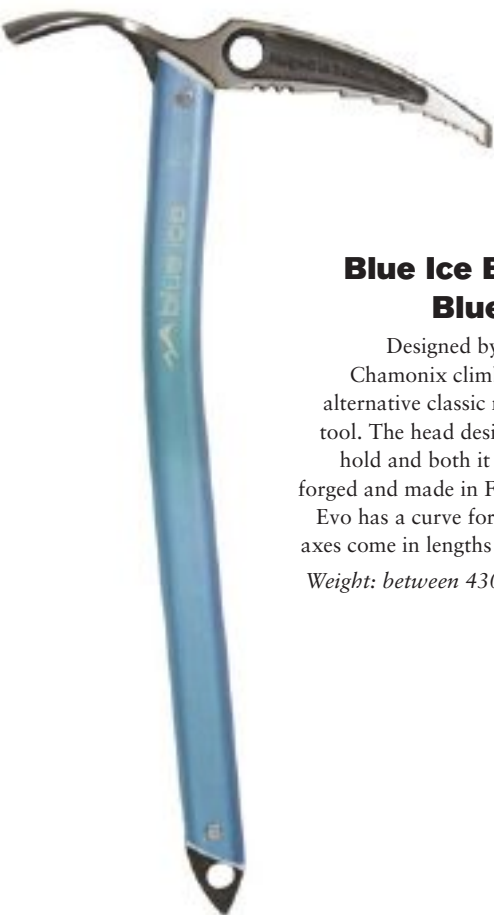
THIS MONTH, OUR GEAR EDITOR TOM RICHARDSON SELECTS SOME OF THE INNOVATIVE NEW CLIMBING PRODUCTS ARRIVING FOR WINTER 2015/16

1 Powertraveller Crankmonkey

The pocket-sized Crankmonkey gives users instant power wherever they are in the world, and might well revolutionise portable power by becoming the most reliable, instant back-up power solution. The Crankmonkey generates power for 5V devices independently of mains electricity or batteries by rotating the handle on the portable charger. It is designed to power up devices including smartphones, GPS units and avalanche transceivers in emergency situations. Just a few minutes of cranking can provide enough charge to revive a completely flat smartphone and enable a potentially life-saving call to be made. The crankmonkey is a lifeline for keeping essential lines of communication open when batteries on crucial electronic kit run out. It can generate enough power to switch on a smartphone and make a call in just 2 minutes. 10 minutes of winding the handle ('cranking') can provide up to 6 – 7 hours of light for a Petzl head torch, 20 minutes of talk-time on an iPhone 6, and 1 hour of cranking to fully charge up a GoPro.

£100

powertraveller.com



2 Blue Ice Bluebird & Bluebird Evo Axe

Designed by a passionate group of Chamonix climbers, the Bluebird is an alternative classic mountaineering/alpine tool. The head design gives a comfortable hold and both it and spike are both hot forged and made in France. The shaft of the Evo has a curve for better placements. The axes come in lengths from 49cms to 75cms.

Weight: between 430 and 540 grms for the different lengths

£100-200

beyondhope.co.uk

3 Arc'teryx Acrux Alpine Boots

Arc'teryx are well known for their innovative and technical clothing and packs. This is their first mountaineering boot, called the Acrux AR GTX Alpine Boot. It is a double boot, but not a high altitude boot; it's rather a technical summer alpine and Scottish winter model. The inner is removable for drying. The outer shell of the Acrux AR GTX is a tough crampon proof and quick drying TPU and GORE-TEX® laminate with a laminated WaterTight™ T-Zip front zip. The removable inner @ liner is vented polyethylene and Gore-Tex that's warm and vented, keeping feet dry in all conditions. These boots look excellent, and I'm looking forward to reporting on them fully in the future.

arcteryx.com



Petzl Crampons ⁴

For 2016 Petzl has completely redesigned its mountaineering crampon range. The IRVIS (£100), VASAK (£115) and SARKEN (£150) designs are all lighter, more sensitive and give greater precision in use. This has been achieved by reducing the space between the sole and crampon, optimising front point positioning, and reducing steel thickness from 2.5mm to 2.3mm. Durability has increased, by using a new steel composition with an improved surface treatment. The range has been simplified by reducing binding options, with all three designs now using the 'FIL FLEX' flexible toe cage (although there is still a front wire bail option). Extra adjustability means front point positioning can be optimised. Together with the 'FLEXLOCK' flexible heel, this ensures the crampons fit any boot from any manufacturer.

£100-£150
petzl.com



5 PrimaLoft® Gold Insulation Down Blend

PrimaLoft® Gold Insulation Down Blend (250g), combines the best characteristics of premium, water resistant down with the proven advantages of synthetic PrimaLoft® microfibre. This means that in foul conditions you'll stay warm and protected for longer. PrimaLoft® Gold Insulation Down Blend is made up of 30% high performance PrimaLoft® ultra-fine fibres and 70% engineered, water resistant goose down. The high quality down is purchased from socially responsible sources and has been treated with PrimaLoft®'s unique and patented ecologically sound fluorocarbon free process, making it permanently water repellent and breathable. Check out Montane's Black Ice jacket launched for winter 2015/16.

primaloft.com



7 Wild Country Twin Axle Friends

Wild Country, the brand who of course introduced the world to spring loaded camming devices way back in the 1970s, are causing another stir on the hardware front: they are bringing out a twin axle cam. The new twin axle Friend is based on the same principles as the original Friend (i.e. at its core is the 13.75 constant cam angle) plus it includes some new ideas such as hollow axles, skimmed lobes that grip better and a new 12mm Dyneema adjustable quickdraw.

wildcountry.co.uk

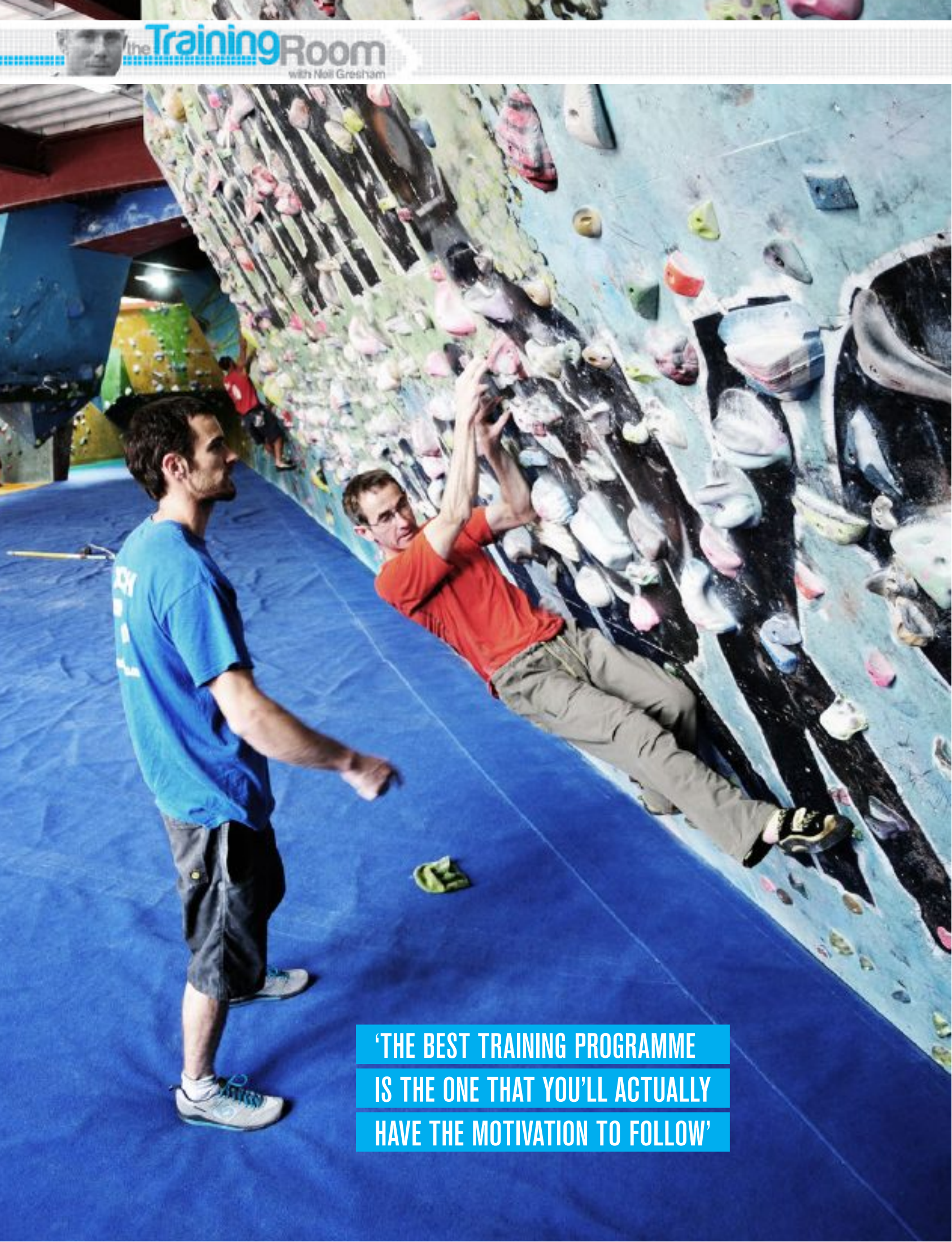


6 New Friction Labs Chalk

You may have thought that chalk is chalk, but apparently this is not so. It's all about the balance of magnesium and calcium. Get it right and you have better grip and less damaged hands; get it wrong and you'll either grease off or get dry, cracked skin. It comes in three different versions too. Bam Bam (super chunky), Gorilla Grip (chunky) and Unicorn dust (fine). It's definitely worth a try.

frictionlabs.com





**'THE BEST TRAINING PROGRAMME
IS THE ONE THAT YOU'LL ACTUALLY
HAVE THE MOTIVATION TO FOLLOW'**

WINTER SESSIONS

A STRATEGIC GUIDE TO TRAINING IN THE COLD SEASON

It's that time of year again: as the evenings start to draw in, the indoor season will soon be upon us. The usual approach is to drift aimlessly from the crags into the climbing wall without ever really pausing to contemplate our direction for the year ahead. But if you're going to be spending all this time climbing indoors this winter then surely you owe it to yourself to get the best returns from it? How about making this the winter where you actually set some firm goals and map out a plan for achieving them? And while we're on the subject, why not do something different this time round rather than rolling out the same old set pieces?

My intention is this article is to avoid going on a periodised training bore-a-thon, as there is perhaps more gratuitous jargon and complexity here than in any other training related topic. Few of us have the time or inclination to produce the detailed training programme of an elite competition climber or Olympic athlete. And besides, most of these guys have their own coaches to perform this task. The best training programme is the one that you'll actually have the motivation to produce and follow. Don't feel that there's no point bothering unless you go into fine detail. If you do nothing more than sketch out an overview it will be the most productive fifteen minutes you'll spend in the entire winter's training. You don't need to be an expert either, because any training programme is better than no training programme at all.

STAGE ONE: TIME OUT

Before you jump in with your plan it's vital to take some time to recover mentally and physically and to consider your options. Even if you don't feel particularly burnt out you should acknowledge the end of the previous season, re-set and start afresh. Do some cross training and one or two very light climbing sessions a week to avoid de-training significantly, but the key is to take a complete step back from hard climbing and not to worry if your performance tails off.

Whilst doing so, consider last year's successes and mistakes. When were you on good form? Do you put this down to physical gains made from last year's training programme, or skill improvements made on the crag, or both? What do you think were the best and worst training sessions and session sequences? Can you put any poor performance periods down to losses

in physical performance, technique, or mental performance? Were injuries, motivation or lifestyle factors responsible? The more you consider these factors, the more directed your training will be and the less likely you will be to repeat any mistakes.

STAGE TWO: MAKE A PLAN

Training programmes work because they motivate people to train consistently and allow themes to be seen through to their conclusion, whilst also helping to prevent injury. A rough overview plan for the next seven or eight months of training and climbing will always have a more powerful effect than a detailed plan for the next 2 or 3 weeks. The aim is to look at the entire period of training, to establish goals and priorities, which in turn influence the themes and tempo of the training. Take a year planner, an A4 sheet or a note page in your phone and divide it into eight months. Mark in any proposed climbing trips during the training period and then put down which crags you'll be aiming to visit and what routes you'll be hoping to attempt as the season commences. Mark in the type of climbing: sport, trad, bouldering (or a combination) and add any relevant variables such as climbing style, hold types, angles, and so on. Don't worry if it all changes, the point is to at least make an attempt. The simple reason for this is because you will always achieve better results if you have specific goals rather than pursuing a vague notion that you generally wish to improve.

1: THE GOAL-BASED PLAN

The next step is to establish the priorities for the blocks of training, which lead up to the trips or periods of climbing. If your goal is trad onsighting, you should train low-intensity endurance as your main priority, followed by high intensity endurance, and finally strength and power. If your goal is sport onsighting, you should also train low-intensity endurance first, followed by equal amounts of high intensity endurance, strength and power. If your goal is sport redpointing, you should train high intensity endurance, strength and power in equal amounts, with low-intensity endurance as your lowest priority. If your goal is bouldering, strength and power should be trained as your highest priority, with a little high intensity endurance if you're into longer problems.

2: THE WEAKNESS-BASED PLAN

The above approach works well for a climber

with relatively balanced performance, who simply needs to re-tune for a given climbing style. However, an alternative for those with severe weaknesses is to allow these to dictate the training priorities. For example, a climber with good endurance but lacking in strength will get the best overall results from the programme by focusing on strength and should do this even if they have a trad climbing trip coming up. Conversely, a very strong climber with poor fitness will get the best overall results from focusing on endurance, at least if they aspire to do well at sport or trad climbing.

PERFORM STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE TESTS

Before you attempt to plan your programme, always start by performing some basic physical tests to record your current level. Don't switch off here, as this is so much easier than you might think. You may well surprise yourself and realise that perhaps you were better or worse than you thought in some areas and this in turn may cause you to reassess your plan. For finger strength, do deadhangs with a full-crimp and half-crimped grip. For arm strength, do 1-arm lock-offs and pull-ups, using a knotted rope or pulley and counterbalance to calibrate the weight. For core strength, do straight-leg raises or front levers. Set the deadhangs so you fail between 2 and 6 seconds and the other exercises so you fail between 2 and 4 reps. For endurance do foot-on campusing and do one test for strength endurance (by using the smaller rungs or a weight-belt where you hit failure between 1 and 2 minutes) and another for low intensity endurance (on the larger rungs where you hit failure between 3 and 5 minutes). It will be of huge benefit to repeat these tests periodically during the programme to see if your efforts have paid off.

WHEN TO PLAN AND WHEN TO IMPROVISE

Few climbers want to be in the clutches of a rigid training plan for the entire winter so it's useful to identify the areas where detail will help and when it may prove restricting. For example, fingerboard or campus board routines should be properly planned, as this will give you the best chance of increasing overload progressively and also monitoring gains. However, most will prefer a looser approach for their climbing sessions. That said, you will definitely get better results if you attempt to set some rough themes for bouldering, routes and circuits sessions, in terms of style of climbing, intensity, the number of moves you're doing, approximate rest times, and so on.

THIS PAGE: Leading British boulderer David Mason coaching top alpinist and British mountain guide Andy Cave at the Climbing Works, Sheffield. Even for advanced climbers, employing a coach can have dramatic benefits on the effectiveness of a training programme. IAN PARNELL



PERIODISATION PROGRAMMES DO NOT HAVE TO BE TOO RIGID. THE ESSENCE OF PERIODISATION IS TO VIEW TRAINING ON A SERIES OF HIERARCHICAL SCALES

PERIODISATION IN BRIEF

This subject has been documented extensively elsewhere, but what follows is a no-nonsense summary. Periodisation is the most commonly used method of training programme planning, both in mainstream sports and also in climbing. Many myths and non-truths surround the subject. For example, programmes do not have to be too rigid and nor do they necessarily produce a single peaking period. The essence of periodisation is to view training on a series of hierarchical scales, or cycles, as follows:

MACROCYCLES / TRAINING PROGRAMMES (TYPICALLY 3 – 6 MONTHS)

These can be either be given an overall priority towards strength or endurance or they can be evenly weighted. They can be used to bring the climber to a single peak at the end of the programme, or to a series of smaller peaks throughout its course (known as non-linear periodisation).

MESOCYCLES / PHASES (TYPICALLY 1 MONTH)

These are always given a theme or priority such as 'strength', 'high intensity endurance' or 'conditioning'. The idea is to focus mainly on the theme but to keep other elements topped up. They should be arranged in the optimum sequence, either to correlate with trips (for example, placing a strength phase before a bouldering trip or a low intensity endurance phase before a trad trip) or to maximize overall effectiveness of the programme. Phase length can be adjusted in order to create an overall priority in the programme towards strength or endurance. For example longer strength phases and shorter endurance phases will produce an overall bias towards strength. Longer phases (6 – 8 weeks) will favour those wishing to see themes through to their full conclusion and for reaching a single peak at the end of the programme, whereas shorter phases (2 weeks) may be better for motivation, as well as for reaching several peaks within the overall programme.

THIS PAGE: Neil Gresham on his new line *Premonition* (8b+) on Kilnsey Main Overhang, Yorkshire. Neil climbed this new route, and a harder one adjacent to it, *Freakshow* (8c) after a focused period of goal-specific training over the winter of 2014-15. PAUL BENNETT

FACING PAGE TOP LEFT: Sam Whittaker performs a bicep curl whilst deadhanging: a highly effective technique for developing strength and explosive power. IAN PARNELL

FACING PAGE LOWER RIGHT: Cedric Lachat keeps his eyes on the prize at the Arco Rockmasters. Working on your weaknesses – such as pure bouldering power if you are a good endurance climber, and vice versa if you're a strong boulderer and you want to improve your sport climbing – will pay major dividends to next year's climbing. DAVID PICKFORD

MICROCYCLES (TYPICALLY 1 WEEK)

These are sequences of training sessions that repeat themselves within a training phase. For example, in a strength-prioritised phase:

Day 1: Strength. Day 2: Endurance. Day 3: Rest. Day 4: Strength. Day 5: Rest. Day 6: Strength. Day 7: Rest. Repeat.

SAMPLE 6 MONTH MACROCYCLE FOR GENERAL SPORT CLIMBING FOR A BALANCED CLIMBER

Phase 1: Conditioning & general fitness - 4 weeks

Phase 2: Low intensity endurance (aka: stamina / aerobic capacity / aerobic power) - 4 weeks

Phase 3: Strength & power - 8 weeks
- bouldering trip

Phase 4: High intensity endurance (aka: strength endurance / anaerobic power / anaerobic capacity) - 4 weeks
- sport climbing trip

Phase 5: Skills and tuning and tapering - 4 weeks

Phase 6: Peak – achieve climbing goals + top-up training

A 'non-linear' version of this programme would simply involve phases that are half the length, thus enabling 2 peaks to be reached in the same period.



FURTHER TIPS FOR GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR WINTER TRAINING

1: SEE A COACH

Before you launch into your winter's training, it is highly advisable to see a coach for a second opinion. A culture of self-teaching still prevails in climbing and it's no surprise that so many hit plateaus or get injured as a result. Not only will a good coach spot any weaknesses that you may have missed, they will give you that all-important different slant on things. They will also motivate you to do your antagonist exercises and those other annoying conditioning sessions that you never quite get round to doing. Rather than asking the coach to plan your programme for you, I would strongly recommend doing it yourself and asking them to tweak it and see if they can spot any gaps. By involving yourself more directly, you will learn so much more about the whole process. It will also be beneficial to check back in with the coach intermittently during the programme, particularly towards the end, so that they can make any necessary adjustments. My recent experience of being coached by Stevie Haston proved to be invaluable in this respect. I recruited his services to help me reach the finishing line on my recent new route at Kilnsey, *Freakshow* (8c). Not only did Stevie freshen up my routines, but he gave me crucial confidence boosts. At a fundamental level it was reassuring to know that someone else was watching my back and cared whether or not I made progress. I would only ever

ONE OF THE GREATEST BENEFITS OF AN OVERVIEW PLAN IS THE INCLUSION OF RECOVERY WEEKS. THESE ARE BEST POSITIONED AFTER THE HARDEST TRAINING PHASES AND IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO IMPORTANT CLIMBING TRIPS

advise using coaches who have climbed to a high level themselves for this role.

2: SEE A NUTRITIONIST

The start of the winter training season is also a great time to consult a nutritionist. Again, I can say from my experience of climbing my Kilnsey project that my nutritional strategy was central to my success, and my coach Glen Burrows deserves credit. Clearly for those operating in the lower grades, the precise composition of your diet is relatively low on the priority list compared to more pressing concerns such as technique, mental performance and tactics. But for more experienced climbers, especially older climbers who are already highly trained, it can be a complete game-changer. The modern approach to sports nutrition is radically different to the way things were last century (and indeed the way the average person tends to eat). In the past I didn't used to believe that the nuances of nutritional strategy made much difference, but that's because the old methods didn't! This is a huge topic, which can't be explored here, but a sports nutritionist could

give you a shake-up that will literally transform your performance. You may need to adopt an open mind and change some old habits, but the results will be worth it. The strategy will be slightly different for the training season compared to the climbing season, so it's worth considering this sooner rather than later.

3: MAKE SURE YOU TAKE RECOVERY PERIODS

Clearly it would be madness to attempt to train flat-out for the entire winter, and thus one of the greatest benefits of an overview plan is the inclusion of recovery weeks. These are best positioned after the hardest training phases and immediately prior to important trips. Again, active rest is nearly always better than full rest. Keep yourself moving but drop the length, intensity and frequency of your sessions right down. Training junkies should consider here that this isn't just about avoiding injury but maintaining the response to training and avoiding burn-out. It's a classic case of a small step back in order to keep maintaining big steps forward.





THIS PAGE: The plains surrounding Vinales, the heart of the Cuban climbing scene, with the limestone mogotes in the distance. **FACING PAGE TOP:** Sarah Garnett climbing pitch 2 of the stunning multipitch line *Flying Hyena* (7b max, 120m) on La Costanera, perhaps Cuba's finest crag. **FACING PAGE LOWER:** The wild abseil from the top of La Costanera: the upper part of the crag is 45 degrees overhanging, 250 feet above the jungle.

ALL DAVID PICKFORD

traditional farming methods that are still used. It is also one of the most important agricultural regions for the country. The valley produces beans, a variety of potatoes and the most important cash crop, tobacco, for the famous Cuban cigars. (They are do highly regarded that allegedly President Kennedy only signed the trade embargo with Cuba in 1961 after he had sight of his batch of 1000 cigars, which moments later would be communist contraband.)

The most recognisable climbing feature in Viñales are the stalactites dripping from the caves or overhanging sections of the Mogotes, but you don't need to be a high level sport climber to enjoy the climbing in the valley. There's a spectrum of climbing styles available. One sector I was very impressed with was Cueva Larga, a shady gem that's hidden away, keeping you cool in the shade offering respite from the Caribbean heat. The place feels like a Caribbean version of Huntsman's Leap in Pembroke, with superb bolted technical wall climbing. Multipitch options are also plentiful in the valley, the most famous of all likely to be *Mucho Pumpito* (6a, 6b) at the crag La Bodega de las Españoles. The 6b second pitch is mind-blowingly steep, with massive holds throughout. Progressing up this soaring arete the exposure is unreal, and the route is probably the best climb of the grade I've ever done.

To get a more real Cuban experience, visitors stay with Cubans in *casas particulares*, where you can rent a room for around \$15 from the gregarious locals. A little Spanish will certainly help, and you'll have a more rewarding experience but you can get by without. Nearly all of the local houses have a porch complete with rocking chairs which are the perfect symbol for Viñales: a place of lazy evenings in perfect temperatures, or lazy rest days rocking away with a good book.

Away from the main scene in Viñales, other parts of the island are being developed. In the department of Sancti Spiritus, a small city right in the centre of Cuba, a crew of young hungry Cubans are lucky enough to have Maikel Rosabal Gómez as their defacto leader and climbing guide.

One area here, Tuinucú, is a sole mogote surrounded by sugar cane plantations, and has less tufa and stalactites than those found in Viñales. My second day with the Sancti crew took me to Sierra de las Damas, a short grey limestone crag they have recently developed. Beautifully positioned next to a river, it has a good mix of styles, and is a great beginners' area.

The Sancti group have also gone further in recent years by being the principal sponsor of the Cuba's annual climbing competition from

THE CUBAN CLIMBING CRISIS

BY STUART LLEWELLYN

Through Yarobi, my climbing guide in Viñales, the famous home of sport climbing in Cuba, I met another Cuban climbing guide in the much lesser known region of Sancti Spiritus. Between my Spanish and his English, Maikel and I were able to come up with plans for the next two days to visit their local crags. Before leaving, Mikael leaves me with two copies of American climbing magazines, one of which has a picture of *Mr Mogote* (7b) in Viñales. He's excited that his country has made international climbing press and that he has a copy. With our transport on the first morning we stepped into a 60's Chevy and back in time, as so often when travelling in Cuba. On the journey to the sector, I ask Maikel if he understood the article in his magazine, but he didn't, so I offered to attempt to translate into Spanish. The opening paragraph is a great story, in which the author describes his first visit to Cuba with the late Craig Luebben, one of the key developers of Cuban climbing, to establish new routes in Viñales. With the 54 year United States trade embargo and defacto ban on American visits to Cuba, they get in via a connecting flight in Cancun, Mexico to Havana. To save weight in his hold luggage, Craig decides to put the drill, batteries, drill bits and other tools into his hand luggage. The bag goes through the x-ray machine, and Mexican security go from placid and calm to full scale alert. The author is left to try and explain themselves to Mexican airport security, as Craig speaks no Spanish. Between mimics, demonstrations and sound effects, trying to explain what they need all this rather unusual hand luggage for, Craig grabs a copy of a climbing magazine that features him new routing in the Cayman Islands. Unbelievably the guards calm down and let them board the plane with the new routing kit. I just about manage to get the key points of the story across to Maikael in Spanish, who then tells the story to

the other five climbers in the car. They all laugh out loud; it was a great moment to share with new amigos.

In January 2012, the Cuban government started to enforce the restrictions it had placed on access to its national parks, for several activities including rock climbing, kayaking, and camping. There apparently wasn't an individual event or problem that triggered the clamp down on access. It was as if someone, somewhere, decided on a whim to change the light bulb from green to red.

For years now the access situation has been in constant flux, and whilst I was there in November 2013, if you had just turned up to Viñales without researching you'd have no idea about the official line. There were many visiting climbers; I even climbed at the same crag as a school group visiting from Norway. My guide for my nine days in Viñales, Yarobi, was one of the first generation of Cubans to start climbing and now is a full time climbing instructor, building a home a few minutes walk from the famous limestone Mogotes.

This journey hasn't been without its hardships for the Cuban climbers. A few years ago, whilst climbing with some visiting climbers at the stalactite-dripping Cuba Libre wall, police officers approached a group. They instructed the foreign visitors to go their hotels, whilst they took a Cuban back to the police station for questioning, fining him \$90, and later also randomly checking by his home to ensure he wasn't out climbing [to put the fine in perspective, a Cuban school teacher receives \$20 a month]. With no official body to represent climbers and fight for access, Cubans have been using venues that are hidden away or at least not in plain sight.

The Mogote walls in Viñales (pronounced 'Binyalaes') scatter the green tobacco fields. The Viñales valley is an UNESCO World Heritage site due to its impressive karst landscape and the

THE 54 YEAR STRETCH OF HOSTILITY BETWEEN THE US AND CUBA HAS FINALLY STARTED TO DEFROST AND THE NEXT FEW YEARS WILL BE AN INTERESTING TIME TO VISIT

2013 – 2015. Usually the venue alternates between Viñales and a new development area. 2014's competition was held in Silla de Gibana, a completely new climbing area in the eastern province of Holguin. The competitions are always well attended by Cubans from all over the island, and also receive international visitors.

The group also took with them \$1000 worth of prizes for competitors and \$1500 worth of equipment to assist with the equipping and development of new routes. Equipment donations are critical for the local climbers: every piece of climbing equipment in Cuba has essentially been left behind by visiting international climbers. Aside from the barrier of cost and wages in Cuba - one quickdraw is the equivalent of a month's average salary - there are no climbing shops.

Up until recently all the developed climbing areas on the island were limestone, but the Cubans have discovered and begun developing their first granite crag, and christened it 'Little Cap'. It's situated in the city Santa Clara, which was the stage of the decisive final battle in Fidel Castro's revolution in 1959.

Little Cap has routes of up to 35m, and Maikel was busy new routing in between answering my emails for this article. Yarobi also sent the very important news that a group of climbers in Viñales had discussions with National Park Authorities about formal permission to climb.



The relationship the climbers have with the locals and the farmers in the area is very strong; it's obvious to them that if access is granted for what is currently considered dangerous sports, it's a benefit to the local economy and the country as a whole. Hopefully some kind of agreement can be made for Viñales, and a precedent is set to help other parts of the country, in keeping with current events and changes in attitudes in government.

The 54 year stretch of hostility between the US and Cuba has started to defrost in recent months with assistance brokered by Pope Francis, where Barack Obama and Raul Castro (the younger brother of Fidel and Cuba's current leader) announced the start of the 'Cuban Thaw'. A relaxation on both sides allowed the United States embassy in Havana to be re-opened on July 20th 2015, with both countries raising each other's flag on their own territory. Some travel restrictions have been lifted for US citizens, and it's now possible to fly from New York JFK to Havana, and plans are waiting final approval for ferry connections to and from Miami.

The next few years will be an interesting time to visit, with US relations drastically changing, and government plans to remove the CUC currency (a tourist currency, which is effectively pegged to the US dollar, which as a foreigner you will use 95% of the time, whilst the locals get paid in Cuban

Pesos at 1/25 the value of a CUC).

If you do plan a trip, try to take over any spare equipment you may have: ask your friends and ask your local climbing community for donations. Without help from international climbers, rock climbing for Cubans would be extremely difficult. Rock shoes in a decent condition and chalk are always in demand. If you can buy some bolts to take over, 10 or 12mm titanium or stainless steel are preferable. That old North Face t-shirt you don't wear anymore, or those Prana trousers that are slightly too small for you - just pack them and give them to a Cuban climber. And take this or any other climbing magazine and give it to a Cuban climber; any climbing material will be massively appreciated, and they'll love this edition in particular as it features their little climbing paradise in the Caribbean.

Viva la revolución de escalada!

Yarobi Garcias Martinez based in Viñales (yaroscal@nauta.cu) and Maikel Rosabal Gómez (maikelclimb@gmail.com) based in Sancti Spiritus, both offer guiding services and will no doubt give you a great welcome and help you have a more Cuban experience, contact either of them for more details of the 2016 competition. For further reading on the subject cubacimbing.com is a great resource in English.





BRAIN BUCKETS

TOM RICHARDSON EXAMINES THE ADVANCES
IN HELMET DESIGN THAT HAVE MADE THIS ONCE
UNFASHIONABLE PIECE OF KIT A MUST-HAVE ITEM



THIS PAGE: Henry Jepson wearing the superlight Petzl Sirocco helmet on *Best Possible Taste*, (HS 4b) on the beautiful wave-washed granite of Cruit Island, Donegal, Ireland. IAN PARNELL

Pioneering British climber Pete Livesey once answered the question about why he didn't wear a helmet by saying that 'helmets were appropriate for beginners, but at a higher level of technical difficulty they would upset [his] balance'.

If ever Pete Livesey's excuse was once justified, these days it is not. Modern helmets are light comfortable, ventilated and can save your life. I think that we can thank the cycling and skiing industries for this change, since they were the first to design helmets that were light and cool - in both senses of the word.

Although wearing a helmet when climbing is a personal choice, the trend is towards wearing one rather than not and I think their use should expand to all areas of climbing including bouldering and even indoor walls.

Head injuries can happen anywhere, and are never trivial. I remember when a friend once fell off a route at Stanage Edge: his gear ripped and he hit the ground. He wasn't wearing a helmet, but there was no sign of any obvious injury. At first he seemed okay and we all laughed. He even got up and shared the banter. A few minutes later he collapsed and was hospitalised and in a serious condition. Even apparently minor injuries from which people appear to be fine can lead to long term brain injuries and mental health problems.

Even if you are a regular helmet wearer, it's worth bearing in mind that helmets, particularly modern lightweight helmets do not last for ever. If a helmet receives a major impact (as in 'I'd be dead if I hadn't been wearing it') you've had your money's worth and it's time to replace it.

Even if this doesn't happen, the effect of UV light, particularly if you use it for sun rock trips or alpine climbing, will destroy it over time.

A helmet with a white (or light-coloured) shell will reflect UV better whilst a dark colour will absorb it, so will be more inclined to more damage and faster deterioration. Be very cautious about using rental helmets, all of which will have had far higher exposure to both UV and being sat on than a personally owned one. Never buy a second-hand helmet, or use a helmet that is designed for something else like cycling or kayaking for climbing, since they are designed to take different impacts. When you buy one, the suggested life span is on the label and whilst these are on the conservative side, usually 10 years, I'm not going to disagree with them.

Equally important however is that for a helmet to give the best protection, it should be worn correctly. The level of protection can be severely reduced if not. Here are some fitting tips:

1. Get the right size. Most helmets are available in at least two sizes and are adjustable internally. When you fit the helmet, adjust the internal cradle mechanism before you adjust the chin straps.
2. The helmet should be about 3 fingers' width above the bridge of your nose. Do not wear it tilted back, exposing your forehead to stone fall.
3. If you can get two fingers under the chin strap, it's too loose.
4. The Y straps should be adjusted to fit below the ears. It should hold the helmet solidly even if you wiggle your head or are in a tumbling fall.
5. The bottom of the helmet should lift no more than a centimetre
6. Whilst the helmet should fit snugly, it's important the main strap doesn't feel taught around your neck

If you plan to use your helmet for both warm weather climbing and winter/ice you will need to go through the above procedure twice. Firstly try it without insulation underneath and then with it. Be careful what you choose to wear for winter. Make sure that your ears are covered. I advise against headwear that is made of Windstopper type fabrics unless they have holes in the ear area as they can inhibit hearing. Anything with bobbles or lumps in it will make the helmet fit uncomfortably. You can often see people staggering back to the CIC Hut after a day on the Ben with their helmet set at a jaunty angle over some warm headwear. In a fall, the helmet would at the very least be less protective than it should be (or might even come off).

COMFORT

In general the more padding there is on the chin strap and around the headband the better. However often the more comfortable the helmet/head contact area is the larger the distance between your head and the top of the helmet. This can be a problem when climbing in corners, roofs and wide cracks. In the end the extra comfort may not be worth it. Ventilation can also make a massive difference to comfort, wearing a close-fitting plastic hat for 8 hours will be sweaty, on the other hand it can keep the rain and snow off too.

Finally, it's an appealing idea to put stickers or even paint on your helmet to customise it. It is not advised as there is a possibility that chemicals in stickers will react with and weaken the material of your helmet.

THIS PAGE: It is easy to overlook the dangers in all climbing: loose rock, an upside down fall or a head impact from a pendulum fall are all possible even on well-bolted sport climbs. Here Josephine Rosenburg chooses to wear a helmet on the bolt and trad protected line of *Canape* (Swedish 7+/E4 6a) at Hällers, Bohuslän, Sweden.

DAVID PICKFORD



HARD SHELL

The traditional hard shell helmets with a webbing internal cradle such as the Petzl Ecrin Roc have been largely superseded these days by those with a more comfortable, lighter, and more impact-resistant foam lining or all foam helmets. Hard shell helmets are heavier and have less side protection but are durable and will withstand being carried in loads. As a starter helmet, the CAMP Roc Star [RIGHT] or the Edelrid Ultralight is of this design and is also great value including the Ultralight Junior model. They are a good choice for expedition use where being hauled to the bottom of the mountain on the back of a yak would destroy many other models (all foam helmets are the weakest in this respect) before the climbing has even started.



HARD SHELL WITH LIGHT FOAM LINER

This design features a thinner rigid shell protecting a layer of foam which rests almost directly on the head of the wearer, making them compact and very versatile and a great choice for most climbing activities. Traditionally the design made it difficult to achieve much in the way of ventilation for warm weather, but this has been overcome recently.

Petzl's classic rock climbing helmets in this category are the Elios, and the women's specific version the Elia. Recently these models have been updated, and now feature adjustable vents with a sliding cover which can be opened or closed, extending their usefulness through winter. They also now have a washable soft foam lining, which makes hot weather climbing more comfortable. They are made from a high density expanded polystyrene foam headpiece on the inside and a thermoformed ABS plastic outer shell, providing both lightness and strength.

The adjustment system is now more compact and intuitive and stows inside the helmet when not in use for easy packing. It is now also compatible with Petzl's Vizion face shield for ice climbing. A simple ratchet system for the head and cam lock for the chin allow for efficient and quick adjustments. Four exterior hooks and a groove in the outer shell are designed to attach and secure a headlamp.

The Elia was designed and developed to respond specifically to the needs of women. The innovative Omega headband system (Petzl patent) allows the helmet to be put on and removed easily and is comfortable. In addition, the Elia has an innovative headband adjustment mechanism: two sliders on the outside of the helmet adjust the internal circumference without catching your hair. The Elios is available in three colours and the Elia in two alternative colours.



Black Diamond's take on this type of helmet is the long established Half Dome [LEFT]. Like the Elios and Elia, it too has had a revamp making it both lighter and a bit more user friendly. A more comprehensive range with a modern look is the Armour series [BELOW] from CAMP, also made with a thick ABS plastic shell and a foam liner. It comes in Men's, Women's and Children's versions and in loads of jazzy colours that would make anyone want to wear them. It weighs 290gms and 320gms depending on the size.





FOAM HELMETS WITH A LIGHT OUTER SKIN/CRUST

This style of helmet has created all the major recent weight savings and performance improvements in helmet design. Rather than a tough outer shell taking all the impact, the foam does. This gives many design advantages such as high strength at the sides and back as well as on top of the helmet. The inspiration is from many cycling and skiing helmets.

Against the many advantages there are some disadvantages such as the fact that the protection is achieved by the foam absorbing the impact, so after an incident it may be of little further use and you may still have a long way to go up the route.

In earlier days of these helmets certification was given to one model, the Petzl Meteor for being suitable for climbing, cycling and kayaking, meaning it was a pretty tough helmet, dealing with impact from many angles. The current Meteor [ABOVE] is only a climbing helmet. The latest improvements include a magnetic buckle and a comfortable harness arrangement.

Weight: 220g (size 1) 225g (size 2)

The Black Diamond Vapor [BELOW] is claimed to be 'a go-anywhere cragging lid that proves helmets aren't just for multi-pitch trad climbs and big alpine faces.'

It comprises several innovative ideas including a sheet of Kevlar and a series of carbon rods between the EPS foam, and a thin polycarbonate shell making it a very light helmet. The Vapor's ratcheting suspension tucks into the helmet for compact storage, and removable headlamp clips secure a head light.

It was launched with quite a bit of razzmatazz a couple of years ago, including a Road to Damascus experience from the US *Rock & Ice* magazine Gear Editor:

'Until now I've never worn a helmet for rock climbing. The Vapor has changed my ways.'

It was a strong competitor for the lightest helmet in the world, but was pipped at the post by the Petzl Sirocco [FACING PAGE TOP]. And, due to the size and quantity of ventilation holes which expose the wearers head, it does not meet the UIAA certification either.

I also know from my own experience that it does not meet the 'carried by yak to base camp test' either, whereas for example a CAMP Armour (at less than 50% of the price) does.

It comes in two sizes: 186g (size S/M), 199g (size M/L).

The Black Diamond Vector helmet on the other hand is more conventional for a helmet in this category. The geometric, co-moulded EPS



foam and polycarbonate shell provides full-coverage protection while remaining lightweight and comfortable. It still has vents but fewer of them so qualifies under the UIAA spec.

Another similar super light and extremely vented helmet of this type is the Mammut Rock Rider [ABOVE]. It weighs 231 and 240 Gms depending on size. The women's version weighs 230gms.





ALL-FOAM HELMETS

Taking the idea of impact absorbing foam helmets a stage further is the widely acclaimed, award winning and widely admired Petzl Sirocco [LEFT].

It has taken first prize in the competition for the lightest climbing helmet in the world.

This has not been achieved by compromising classic design, but by using a material which is new to climbing helmets, expanded polypropylene. It is closed cell foam which is extremely resistant to impact, flexible, light and returns to its original shape when flexed. Other lightweight helmets are made from expanded polystyrene which is good at absorbing impact but deforms or breaks

in the process, limiting the lifetime of the helmet and meaning it requires more care when handling.

This new material is so strong that it passes both CE and UIAA tests without the need for an outer shell or an inner cradle to absorb energy, keeping the weight very low. This is further helped by the new adjustment system which uses a narrow piece of tape rather than a bulky plastic ratchet system. The excellent ventilation and clever one-handed magnetic chin strap buckle are nice touches too.

You won't notice you are wearing it, so it's worth checking that you are before setting off. It looks a bit unusual, although a lot less so as more and more people catch on to the idea.

It weighs a mere 145 or 165 gms, depending on size.

ALTERNATIVE HELMETS

Edelrid Madello

These helmets came out a few years ago and whilst you have to admire the design skill of someone who can create a full spec climbing helmet that folds up to a volume of about 50% of normal, you can't help but wonder why such a thing is needed.

The answer is that it reduces storage space and fits under the seat of a rescue helicopter perfectly. In use I found that it sits rather high on the head, so for the climbing aspect of things I'd go for something that does that better.

Edelrid claim that it is 'the first and only foldable climbing helmet on the market' and it will probably remain so for ever. It has an ABS plastic shell 3 different foams in the lining, and 4 head torch clips. One size fits a head circumference of about 52 - 62cm.

CHILDREN'S HELMETS

Popular Hard Shells already mentioned include the CAMP Armour Junior and Edelrid Ultralight Junior [RIGHT]. Foam helmets with light hard shells for children include the wacky-patterned Edelrid Kid's Shield 2.



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DESERT EAGLES

In this exclusive extract from *Up and About*, the first volume of Doug Scott's long-awaited autobiography, Doug describes his arrival in the remote Tibesti Mountains of Chad in 1965

In 1938 Wilfred Thesiger had been the first European into this valley and there had most likely not been any visits since. Clive Davies and I were the first into Modra and were immediately invited into a hut by two tribesmen, once they had got over their surprise at seeing two young Englishmen wandering around their village. They did not speak French but we were shown by sign language to sit and rest on a mat in front of a crackling fire. Cool water from the wadi was passed round, which was a luxury to be savoured after weeks of drinking water stored in jerry cans that tasted faintly of turpentine. A bowl of dates was handed round and slowly consumed, while an old woman, dressed in a tattered black dress, tended the fire.

It grew dark soon after our arrival, but in the firelight I watched the long fingers of our host as he carefully prepared tea. Then a long, sinewy arm reached out across the charcoal embers, handing us both a small glass of a very strong and refreshing brew infused from local herbs and spices. The moonlight filtering through the door allowed us to take in our strange surroundings. Closely woven reed baskets hung from the palm-wood frame of this guest room. By the low entrance hall stood a tall, wooden bowl with a long, wooden pounder, used to crush corn for the evening meal of couscous. The floor was sifted gravel, spotlessly clean and with no odours at all until we arrived covered in grime and sweat.

Our two male hosts had daggers hanging below their armpits. They sat cross-legged, in the lotus position, both wearing turbans and long, striped smocks; their feet were partly covered by open sandals and bore the scars from a lifetime stepping on sharp rocks and prickly thorn bushes. With conversation reduced to the occasional sign from our hands, we had time to consider the enormous difference between this simple hut and our own complicated homes in Nottingham five thousand miles away. We also contemplated our good fortune in finding the inhabitants so friendly and hospitable, although we turned down their offers to stay the night and walked the five miles back to our lorry for a stew and a regular cup of tea.

In the morning we all moved to the village with our baggage where the villagers, realising we were not just passing through, offered us a hut which we gladly rented for the next three weeks. Our daily routine was to wake



early in the cool of morning, when we would fetch water and dead wood from around the wadi and have porridge and coffee. Then Mick Garside and I, armed with theodolite and plane table, worked on the map we were triangulating. We also aimed to indicate on our plan of the settlement how the land was used and the system of irrigation. Two local lads, dubbed Coke and Freddy, were useful assistants, holding poles and stretching out the chain measurer. Coke agreed to organise donkey transport to take water and food up towards Tieroko. Fred became our faithful Tibbu servant around the hut, fetching wood and water and putting on brews for bed tea for as long as our barley sugars held out. This gave us an extra hour in bed, which was well worth foregoing sweets.

With the sun at its zenith we walked back to the hut and slept in its cool interior until late afternoon, when villagers began arriving to demand pills for headaches or stomach cramp and treatment for cuts and festering sores. We treated septic wounds quite effectively with antibiotics but for ailments we couldn't handle we worked on the principal of psychological healing and gave aspirin from our first-aid boxes, donated by Boots - the Nottingham chemist. As in the Atlas in Morocco, our first aid provision gained us many friends amongst the Tibbu in Chad.

There was one illness we couldn't do anything about. Clinging high above the wadi was a spring-line settlement, over a thousand feet higher than ours, where an old woman lay in her hut, grossly swollen around her stomach and ankles. We offered her some food, aspirin and vitamin pills and just to comfort her we walked up twice a day. We were given cool goats' milk and dates by her daughters. Below the old woman's hut was a waterfall that sparkled as it cascaded over a black, basalt dyke into a deep green pool. The water was led along a large channel cleverly contouring above the fields. From this main channel the water passed through an intricate maze of subsidiary channels to each of the small fields below. After watering the terraced fields at four or five levels, only a small trickle arrived back at the wadi floor.

It never ceased to amaze us how self-sufficient the villagers were. Material for huts came from within a few yards of where they were built; dates and millet grew abundantly, as did tea and various root crops. Goats provided

fresh meat and daily milk. Goat hair was used for spinning into yarn and woven into rough clothing. Goatskins made a variety of domestic utensils, dagger-sheaths and gourds but were most useful in making sandals and saddles for the camels. Date palms provided food, fuel and shelter; the stones were ground down to a powder for animal fodder. Fibres from palm trunks were matted together to form pads for saddles and also twisted into stout rope and woven into baskets with reeds from the wadi. We watched as the women wove rush mats and wound rushes into coils and then into bowls that were so closely fitted as to be watertight. Only fabric for clothes and a few metal goods came from beyond Modra Wadi, paid for from the sale of dates, goats and, on rare occasions, camels. Anything else seemed superfluous to their needs.

We soon adapted to our new environment, sitting for hours bartering for a woven reed bowl with an old woman wearing crude, leather sandals, a black smock, a ring in her nose and a colourful scarf, gypsy fashion, around her plaited hair that glistened with goat fat. Pete played his mouth organ while Clive began sketching the Tibbu by the white light of the pressure lamp. The young men had brought their wives along and they collapsed in hysterics at the drawings. The men broke into excited chatter when we showed them photographs of Thesiger's Arabs from Arabia, pointing out the differences in apparel and their camels – and the rolling dunes that were absent from Tibesti.

Time passed all too quickly in Modra, and we needed to focus on Tieroko. On the drive round we had seen it from every side but at a distance it was little more than a silhouette. Our French maps did not explain the complicated gorges that carved up the region. A sketch from the first Cambridge expedition in 1957 helped fill in the picture. They narrowly failed on Tieroko but climbed other peaks in the vicinity. Tieroko, at 2,910 metres, is actually the highest point on the south side of another eroded crater rim. The area is particularly isolated, barren and difficult to traverse. Torrential downpours that occasionally drench the mountains cause the temporary streams to eat deep into the soft volcanic rocks. They have cut the mountains into serrated ridges and crazy pinnacles that make route finding a formidable problem. Yet the main problem was maintaining adequate water supplies. In the whole of our journey in North Africa we only saw running water at Modra, and the only water in the mountains comes from rock pools known as *guelta*.

We left Modra with two heavily laden donkeys and Coke whom we hoped



would point out the waterholes. Walking over ten miles of boulder-strewn country, we then crossed dry valleys draining the south side of Tieroko's crater, eventually coming to the wadi that drained Tieroko itself. We slept the night by some stone circles and Coke returned home after indicating that water could be found at the bottom of the wadi. We climbed down and then back up towards the west ridge of Tieroko, carrying the maximum amount of water we could manage, two gallons each, which weighed in itself twenty pounds. With all our climbing gear and food, our sacks weighed fifty pounds. To reach the ridge, we crossed rough slabs to a dyke of softer rock that provided a line of weakness. It was five very tired, red-faced ramblers who settled down for the night. According to my diary, we cooked our thirtieth stew of the expedition, and watched the fabulous sunset.

Perhaps because of the altitude, we did not sleep well and were up early, shivering in the cold of morning. I had read that snow falls in the Tibesti at this time of year on the rare occasions there is precipitation. Now I believed it. After coffee and porridge, we explored the western side of the peak to find a route on to the final summit cone but our search was in vain and we were forced to climb back up 4,000 feet to our bivouac. Running short of water, we turned down the west ridge to Paradise Wadi – so named for the trees around some murky, stagnant pools. Very tired, we slung off our packs and soon had a roaring fire, feasting on corned beef hash and settling in for a better night's sleep by the glowing embers.

Food was now the issue, so we rose early for another attempt to find a way on to the upper section of Tieroko, following the gorge, sometimes on the left bank, sometimes on the right, around deep pools on the wadi floor. We saw wild Barbary sheep, powerful beasts with magnificent horns capable of gigantic leaps but still able to maintain their balance on the most crumbly rock. Finally, having turned up a right branch of the wadi's gorge, we came to a pool that proved to be one of the highest in all the Tibesti, from which we based our final attempt.

Up and About will be published in early November by Vertebrate Publishing, and signed copies can be ordered direct from v-publishing.co.uk

FACING PAGE: One of our lorries dwarfed by the huge Aiguilles de Sisse where we made a number of climbs. **LEFT:** A Tibbu tribesman of the central Sahara carrying his sword and rifle. **TOP RIGHT:** Apart from its 900-metre north face, Tieroko offered no great problems and we put up three new routes. **COVER IMAGE:** Dougal Haston on the South Summit of Everest on September 24th 1975. ALL DOUG SCOTT / COURTESY VERTEBRATE PUBLISHING





THE LONELY IMPULSE

Alone on the Wall by Alex Honnold, with David Roberts (hardback £16.99, paperback £14.99, eBook £10.99)

'One of my favourite aspects of soloing is the way pain ceases to exist' writes Alex Honnold, the world's most accomplished free soloist, in the chapter describing his 2014 solo of the Mexican big wall testpiece, *El Sendero Luminoso* (5.12c or 7b+, 550m). This arresting line is just one of many gnomic insights into the inner life of one of the most remarkable climbers in modern history in *Alone On The Wall*, written by Honnold in conjunction with renowned American journalist and climber David Roberts.

Rather than adopting the format of a ghostwritten autobiography, Honnold and Roberts have literally co-written the book, with each chapter a montage of first-person narrative by Honnold (in italics throughout) set against an informative context of Honnold's life and climbs written by Roberts. The effect of the form is striking: it feels as if we're sharing a café table with the two men, as Honnold tells his story and Roberts listens, questions, investigates, suggests and affirms.

I have to confess a particular personal interest in Honnold's story. He's been a personal friend since we first climbed together for three weeks in Spain in the autumn of 2009; I've also climbed with him in England and in Turkey. And because free soloing has been an important part of my climbing life too, albeit at a somewhat more moderate level, I wondered if I could shed some light on my own motivation to solo by reading this book.

Honnold's early years growing up in California are striking for the way he functioned well academically (although perhaps not socially) in the context of a great deal of private pain. His parents were unhappily married. His father died when he was just 19. He maintained a distance from his peers at school, and disliked University life so much he dropped out after his freshman year.

The enjoyment of being completely alone in wild nature and in the presence of mortal danger is at the heart of the thrill of soloing, and it's clear from the first chapter of *Alone On The Wall* – which features a brilliant account of Honnold's solo of *Moonlight Buttress* (a 1200 foot 5.12d) in Zion, Utah in April 2008, which rocketed him into the limelight – that the sheer joy of moving well over pristine stone in an amazing place is fundamental to Honnold's passion for soloing. As he says of reaching the top of the wall: 'I was superpsyched. During that hour and twenty-three minutes, I'd climbed as well as I ever had in my life.' When I free climbed *Moonlight Buttress* myself in 2010, I was horrified by the thought of Honnold soloing it; it involves sustained E6 climbing a thousand feet above the ground. Having now read his account of it, I'm less shocked, since the careful rehearsal

and preparation that went into it becomes clear. Although what he does is outrageously daring, the methodology of his approach is calm and careful.

Another of Honnold's character traits that shines through the pages of this book is his extreme nonchalance, which verges on pure dead-panning, such as his description of The Fitzroy Traverse (which he did with Tommy Caldwell in 2014) as 'a really fun five day camping trip with a good friend.' To any climber who understands the terrain that the two climbers covered over those five days, Honnold's idea of 'a camping trip' is, well, a little unusual. Underlying his disarming dismissal of what to most people (and indeed, to most hardcore climbers) would seem like outrageous feats of courage lies Honnold's unique approach to danger. There's something of the Old West frontiersman about him, always looking for new horizons, and something of the Special Forces guy, too: as Tommy Caldwell puts it in the piece he wrote in *Alpinist* magazine about the Fitzroy Traverse, 'It's as if he thinks everything is either badass or boring....[and] that's probably why he's so good at what he does. In an age of technology, he reminded me of a lost instinct. A hunter, a warrior.'

The last chapter of the book brings us up to date with Honnold's life, including a revealing account of the reasons behind his recent separation from his long-term girlfriend Stacey Pearson. Many climbers, I think, will relate to the difficult choice Honnold faces between leading the ultimate climber's life touring in his van and a more conventional, rooted existence. The fact he chooses the former defines, perhaps, what he truly values.

Some of the more penetrating insights into the real value of climbing come in this final section: '[Along] with the critique that climbing is selfish is the claim that climbing is useless. But I think that perfecting your skills on rock (or ice and snow) ends up improving you in other ways' Honnold writes. He also offers a spirited defence of the practice of soloing, responding to accusations, mainly from outside the climbing community, that through his daredevil antics he's a poor role model for young people.

Every chapter of *Alone On The Wall* is packed not just with action but also with striking insights into the inner life and personality of one of the most accomplished climbers in the entire history of our sport. As David Roberts writes at the end of his acknowledgements, 'whatever the virtues of [this book], they spring directly from Alex's character – not only as a climber but also as a human being.'

To anyone who's ever climbed solo, it's a must-read. At the same time, it's also worth a read if you're a sport climber or boulderer who thinks soloing is unjustifiably dangerous, or indeed as a present for your curious non-climbing friend who keeps asking you 'who's this American guy who does all this free climbing, then?'

- David Pickford



HARDSHIP'S GLADIATORS

Alpine Warriors by Bernadette McDonald (Rocky Mountain Books, hardcover £20, Kindle edition £11.77)

The idea of a single definitive history has long been debunked. Instead, a multitude of cultures and groups have their own stories, who often painting close to the centre of historic influence. Whilst these histories overlap, our awareness of other, parallel narratives is often blinkered by barriers of language and culture. This is particularly evident in climbing, which remains largely

parochial and ignorant of the wealth of stories from other nations. This is why Bernadette McDonald's book, the first English language history of post-war Yugoslavian mountaineering, is so valuable.

McDonald's 2011 book *Freedom Climbers*, which told the history of Polish climbing, won both the Boardman Tasker Award and the Banff Festival Grand Prize. *Alpine Warriors* might be even better – I certainly enjoyed it more, mainly because much of the Polish story was already familiar to me, as it would have been to most experienced British readers, through the connections with British alpinism's golden generation from the 70s and early 80s. The history of Yugoslavian mountaineering is a lesser-known story. Granted Tomo Cesen, Marko Prezelj and Tomaz Humar have lit up modern mountaineering's headlines. But what about Aleš Kunaver, the equal of Chris Bonington as one of the great leaders of post war expedition mountaineering, or Stane Belak-Strauf, whose combination of Whillans-like toughness and Scott-like ambition resulted in many of the Himalaya's hardest ascents to date?

One of the joys of this book is being introduced to such a rich cast of extraordinary characters. It's like the thrill when, as a young climber, you hear your first Don Whillans anecdote; only in Slovenia there seem to have been a dozen such figures. Much of the book's success stems from how McDonald has made the narrative people-driven rather than climbing-driven. *Alpine Warriors* shows how such strong personalities were an essential response to Yugoslavia's brutal history, where through sheer force of will climbers rose up as individuals above the chaos of post-war reprisals, Tito's communist dictatorship and the rising spectre of a brutal trans-regional ethnic war in the 90s.

Perhaps McDonald's most successful device, and the one that makes *Alpine Warriors* stand out from other climbing histories, is her decision to use the writings of Nejc Zaplotnik as a kind of guide to the communal psyche of Slovenian mountaineering. A Talismanic figure, Zaplotnik's dashing ascents were matched in verve by his deeply poetic and philosophical writings. McDonald found his book *Pot (The Path)* on the bookshelves of almost every Slovenian climber she interviewed and she uses excerpts from Zaplotnik to knit together her narrative. It's a neat trick, as it almost feels you are getting two books for the price of one – Zaplotnik's beautiful insights into the human condition and McDonald's polished storytelling. And what a story it is. Her re-telling of the communal efforts on the South Face of Lhotse in which the climbers forced themselves on against continuous avalanches reads as a definition of human limits, whilst the account of the controversies surrounding Cesen's claims on the same face uncover other extremes of human behaviour.

This is an extensively researched, brilliantly told and insightful book. If you are interested in hearing some of the most jaw-dropping tales in mountaineering history, meeting some of its biggest characters, or looking into the heart of why we climb then *Alpine Warriors* is a must read.

– Ian Parnell



THE 2015 SHORTLIST FOR THE BOARDMAN-TASKER

In Some Lost Place by Sandy Allen (Vertebrate Publishing, £24)

If the epic narrative of this outstanding ascent were not enough, Sandy Allen is able to articulate the complexities of an apparently simple partnership with Rick Allan that reaches into realms, in the final stages of survival, unique in the literature of mountaineering.



Snowblind: Tales of Alpine Obsession by Daniel Arnold (Counterpoint, \$15-95)

Daniel Arnold is an accomplished storyteller who sets himself dramatic challenges that he explores with page-turning tension combined with psychological insights. The seemingly effortless prose belies a sophisticated and knowing craft that is able to conjure the real thing.



The Calling: A Life Rocked by Mountains by Barry Blanchard (Patagonia, £19-99)

The irrepressible Barry Blanchard has vivid recall of every detail of his passionate struggle to escape poverty, throw himself into a hairy apprenticeship and establish himself as a non-establishment alpinist pushing himself through historic climbs and relishing the telling of the tale.



Cold Feet, Stories of a Middling Climber by David Pagel (self-published, £12)

For thirty years David Pagel has been contributing to American magazines wry, self-effacing accounts of his climbing his way through classic peaks, famous personalities and our often puzzling mountaineering culture. His bemused sense of fun cannot disguise his climbing and writing achievements.



One Day as a Tiger by John Porter (Vertebrate Publishing, £20)

Was John Porter a culpable partner in a generation that was climbing itself into extinction? As he reflects upon this question through a biography of Alex MacIntyre, Porter recreates both the anarchic spirit of an era and its uneasy flaws with unflinching personal honesty.

FACING PAGE: Half Dome, Yosemite, with evening cloud smoking around the summit: the home of the *Regular Northwest Face* (5.12) which was free soloed by Honnold in 2008. DAVID PICKFORD

Welsh Climbing Championships 2015

Now in its 7th year, the Welsh Climbing Championships is back for 2015, taking place at Beacon Climbing Centre in Caernarfon, North Wales on Saturday 7th November. If you love lactic and forearm pump is your thing then this is the competition for you.

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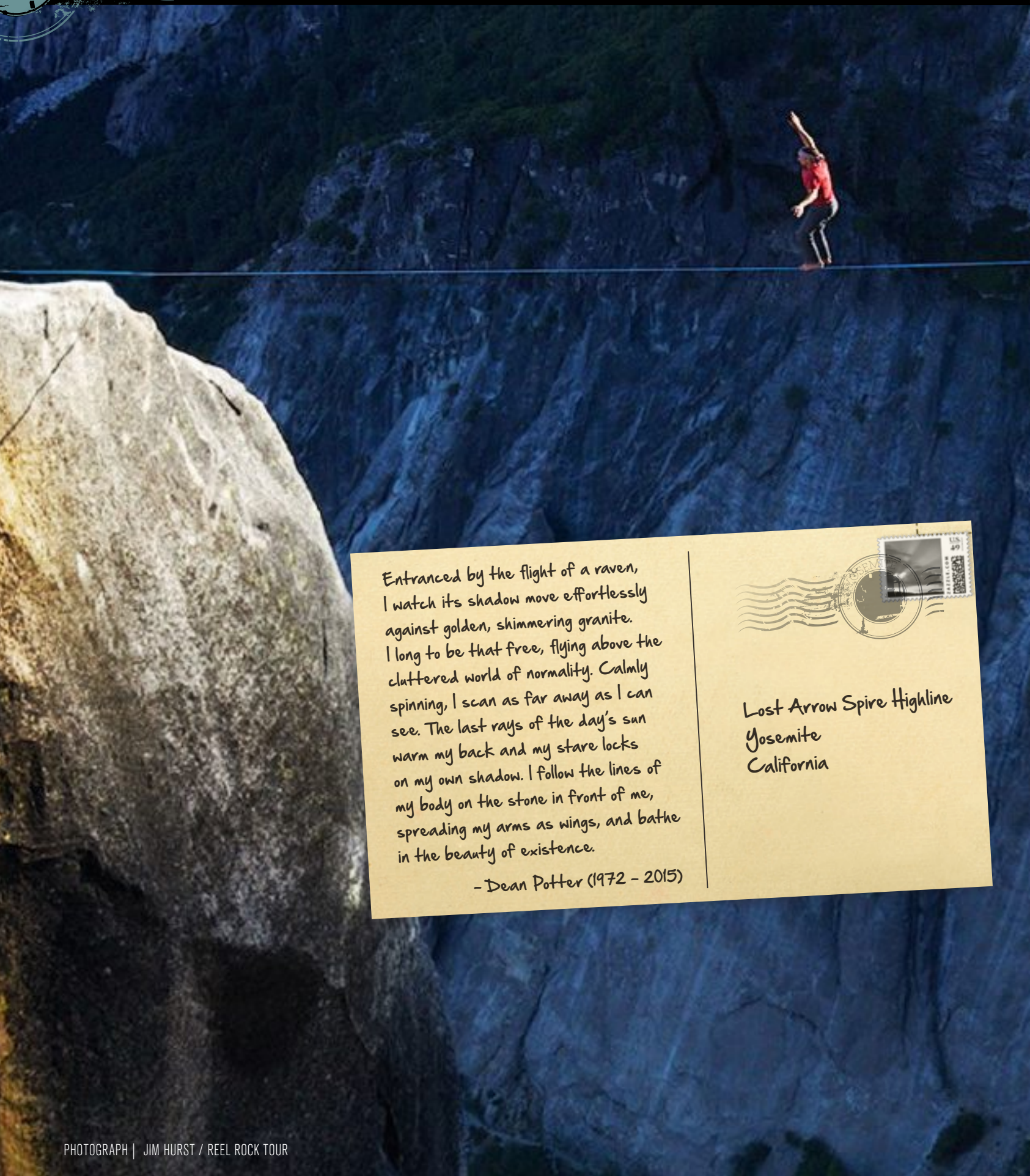
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Entranced by the flight of a raven,
I watch its shadow move effortlessly
against golden, shimmering granite.
I long to be that free, flying above the
cluttered world of normality. Calmly
spinning, I scan as far away as I can
see. The last rays of the day's sun
warm my back and my stare locks
on my own shadow. I follow the lines of
my body on the stone in front of me,
spreading my arms as wings, and bathe
in the beauty of existence.

- Dean Potter (1972 - 2015)



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